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A206
Arts: A Second Level Course

The **ENLIGHTENMENT**



Nathan the Wise
Gotthold Ephraim Lessing



Nathan the Wise
by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
Translated from the German
Nathan der Weise

by Stephanie Clennell and Robert Philip

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G. E. Lessing

Introduction

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 1729–81

The young scholar

Lessing was born in 1729 in the small town of Kamenz in the Protestant state of Saxony. His family background was Lutheran and academic. His father, Johann Gottfried Lessing, was chief pastor of the main church in Kamenz. Johann Lessing had studied at the University of Wittenberg and kept up his academic interest by writing and translating theological works, but he had a large family and was very poor. He applied successfully to the Elector of Saxony for a scholarship for his eldest son, Gotthold Ephraim, to attend the prestigious electoral school (Fürstenschule) of St Afra in Meissen.

St Afra had high academic standards. Life there was austere, with an emphasis on religious observance. The young Lessing thrived on the rigorous classical training, and impressed his teachers with his intellect and independence of mind.

When Lessing left the school in 1746 he became a student of Protestant theology at the University of Leipzig, as his parents wished. At first he devoted himself to study, as he had done at school, but then in Leipzig 'a place where one can see the whole world in miniature' he began to realize that he needed to educate himself for living in society. He wrote in a long letter to his mother: 'I learned what a difference there was between me and other people. A timid country lad, a clumsy, graceless body, complete ignorance of manners ... I felt a sort of shame that I had never felt before.'¹

He learned to dance, fence and ride; and he discovered the theatre. At that time a theatre company run by the formidable Karoline Neuber² was presenting plays in Leipzig, including translations of classical French plays. Lessing became passionately interested in the theatre. He wrote a play *The Young Scholar* ('Der junge Gelehrte') which was successfully performed by the Neuber company in 1748. His lifelong active interest in the theatre had begun, and at the same time led to the first

¹ 20 January 1749. Vol XVII no.6 in Lachmann-Muncker edn. of Lessing's *Sämtliche Schriften* (complete writings), 3rd edn. Berlin, Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1886–1924. Letters: vols XVII–XXI.

² Karoline Neuber (1697–1760) was well educated and of good family. She escaped from a cruel and tyrannical father by eloping with a young student, whom she married in 1718. Their only recourse was to join a theatrical troupe and some years later Karoline was managing her own company.

disputes with his parents. They were worried, horrified even, by this worldly interest. Indeed to strict Lutherans the theatre was anathema (a point briefly referred to in *Nathan the Wise*). Lessing respected his parents' views, and he remained, in his way, a dutiful son. He did not see his developing independence of thought as a revolt against them, but rather wanted to make them understand his own changing outlook, including his wish to give up the study of theology. This need to come to terms with his own and other people's views on religion lasted all his life, as you will find when you read *Nathan the Wise*.

With his father's reluctant approval Lessing changed to the study of medicine and philology. He did not complete his studies in Leipzig, because he had to make a quick escape. The Neuber theatre company was in debt and disbanded. Lessing had imprudently acted as surety for some of the actors; he was in no position to provide any money, and went secretly to the University of Wittenberg. 'For the first and only time in his life he was guilty of a dishonourable action' said H.B. Garland (1962, p.9).

Lessing enrolled as a medical student in Wittenberg, but fell ill, and gave up his studies after a few months and went to Berlin. He had decided that he would try to live as a writer in Berlin. There would be for him no respectable career as a pastor or university teacher, as his parents had hoped; instead he would face hardship, insecurity and poverty. But he would be independent.

The spread of Enlightenment

In 1748 it was just possible to make a living by writing. Johnson in England, and Diderot in France, are notable examples of this. There was a growing demand for literary works to which publishers responded. In the German states, periodicals, the so-called 'moral weeklies', began to appear in the 1720s, following the example of the English *Tatler*, *Spectator*, and *Guardian*. There were hundreds of these periodicals by the 1760s, although the life-span of each was short (about three years). More specialized periodicals also appeared, such as learned journals (which had appeared in Latin in the seventeenth century) and literary and political periodicals. It was through these that 'the process of the enlightenment as an overall movement began', according to Auer (1929, p.30).

Lessing was well equipped to take part in this movement. He had had a sound academic training and people like him could earn a little money by writing, editorial work, private teaching or translation. Lessing widened his own knowledge of works, especially contemporary ones, in English, French and Spanish, as well as German. He had a talent for publicity. He made the most of speedy and frequent publication, so that his writings and his ideas spread quickly among the enlightened élites in the various German states. From 1751 he was an editor of the Berlin Gazette (the *Berliner privilegierte Zeitung*) and its monthly supplements,

and was cited as an important critic.³ With like-minded friends in Berlin he was able to carry on a campaign for enlightened ideas. As this stage this meant questioning, analysing and criticizing existing ideas and works. He was relentlessly critical of Professor Johann Christoph Gottsched's⁴ attempts to improve German literature, particularly drama, by insisting on close imitation of French classical literature of the seventeenth century. Instead Lessing put forward other models, such as Shakespeare, and introduced new works and ideas to the reading public in Germany. For example, Rousseau's essay the *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* appeared in 1750, and Lessing reviewed this work (and questioned its assumptions) just a few months later, in April 1751.

Lessing was ready to take risks, stir up trouble, and criticize the eminent. As a critic he was intent on raising standards, as someone who '... does not deny the truth in order to flatter, is convinced that a warning about a bad book is a service which one renders to the public, one which is more worthy of an honest man than a servile facility for bartering praise for praise' (*Letters on modern literature, Briefe die neueste Litteratur betreffend*, 1759).

His attacks were specific and the most eminent contemporaries were not spared. '... and Voltaire's *Zaire*? How inferior it is to the *Moor of Venice* (*Othello*) of which it is a poor copy'.⁵ Lessing's contacts with Voltaire (Frederick the Great's guest in Berlin from 1750–53) were mainly unfortunate. He had done some translation for Voltaire, notably of his *History of the Crusades*. A friend, Richier de Louvain, Voltaire's secretary, had lent the proofs of Voltaire's *Age of Louis XIV* (*Siècle de Louis XIV*) to Lessing, who carelessly took them with him when he went to Wittenberg in 1751. Voltaire was outraged, suspected a pirating attempt, and complained to Frederick, who did not forget the incident.

Lessing's reason for returning to Wittenberg was to get his Master's degree. He was successful, and returned to Berlin in 1752 to work again for the *Berliner privilegierte Zeitung*.

Friends and allies

Berlin was now an important centre of serious literary criticism. There was relative freedom of expression (except in writing about politics and

³ 'A new critic has appeared here whose work you will be able to judge from the enclosed review of *The Messiah* (Klopstock's epic poem). He just seems a little young.' J.J. Sulzer to J.J. Bodmer (in R. Daunicht (1971) *Lessing im Gespräch*, München).

⁴ Gottsched (1700–66) *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst für die Deutschen* (Essay on the Art of Poetry for Germans, 1730).

⁵ *Letters on modern literature* No.17, 1759.

the State, as Lessing said in a later acid comment).⁶ Lessing had a circle of friends among writers, booksellers and publishers. In 1754 he met two men who became his lifelong friends and with whom he worked closely in Berlin. They were Friedrich Nicolai⁷ (1733–1811), a writer and bookseller, and Moses Mendelssohn⁸ (1729–86), whom he first met as a chess-player. In October 1754 Lessing wrote of Mendelssohn: '[He] is actually a Jew, aged about 20, who, without any education, has a remarkable grasp of languages, mathematics, philosophy and poetry. I expect him to become an honour to his nation, if he is allowed to develop fully, unlike those of his religion who are always driven by a terrible spirit of persecution'.⁹

Moses Mendelssohn was the son of a public scribe in Dessau. He had been taught by a rabbi, and when the rabbi went to Berlin, Moses, at the age of 14, followed him there, determined to educate himself and live as best he could by copying and teaching. As a Jew he had very few rights even in Frederick the Great's Prussia. Jews still had a separate and subordinate legal status. Some few had a special status as protected Jews (*Schutzjuden*). In 1753 Frederick revised the regulations about Jews, but mainly in order to make use of a small number of wealthy Jews as manufacturers and bankers. In 1749 Lessing had already written a play *The Jews* (*Die Juden*, published in 1754) in which he deplored anti-Semitic prejudice, but his friendship with Mendelssohn was his first close contact with a Jew. As Lessing hoped, Mendelssohn's intellect and integrity were recognized and he became an eminent philosopher, who believed that the essential principles of his own religion could be reconciled with modern enlightened secular learning. In *Nathan the Wise* Nathan is such an enlightened Jew, and although the character, Nathan, is not a portrait of Moses Mendelssohn, Mendelssohn probably had a considerable influence on Lessing's conception of the role.

The article *Philosophe* in the *Encyclopédie* (*Texts*, I p.9) speaks of: 'This love of society, which is so essential to the *philosophe*'. Lessing and his friends were like the French *philosophes* in this respect. They had little money, little time for frivolity, but meetings, clubs, long conversations and discussions, and correspondence, were their life-blood.

⁶ Letter from Lessing to Friederich Nicolai, 25 August 1769 in document 45 in *Texts*, I, Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, Letters and Documents, p.63.

⁷ See footnote 6.

⁸ Moses Mendelssohn was the grandfather of the composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy.

⁹ To the Göttingen theologian and orientalist Johann David Michaelis. (*Lachmann-Muncker*, Vol. XVII No.34).

Achievement and reputation

Lessing already had a considerable reputation as a writer when he was in his twenties. He had published poems, fables, literary criticism, studies in theological history, and five plays: *The Young Scholar, Damon, or True Friendship, The Old Maid, The Jews*, and *The Freethinker*. The plays were all comedies, but all had a moral content. Lessing's ideas about open-mindedness in religion and his criticism of prejudice and intolerance are clearly seen in *The Jews* and *The Freethinker*. In *The Jews* a baron is rescued from robbers by a stranger whom he welcomes to his home as a worthy and cultivated man. The baron, who has anti-Semitic prejudices, thinks that his attackers were Jews, but it turns out that they were his own servants in disguise, and that his rescuer is a noble-minded Jew.

In 1755 Lessing and Moses Mendelssohn collaborated on an essay: *Pope – a Metaphysician!* (*Pope – ein Metaphysiker!*). The Berlin Academy of Sciences had offered a prize for an essay on Pope's proposition in the *Essay on Man* – 'whatever is, is right'. Their joint essay on this subject was scathing about any claim that Pope, as a poet, might have to a grasp of philosophy; but they were not critical of Leibniz, as Voltaire was shortly to be in his poem on the Lisbon disaster (1756) and *Candide* (1759). The Berlin Academy did not favour Leibniz's views. Lessing and Mendelssohn did not enter for the prize, but published their essay anonymously, well aware that they were dealing with a contentious issue of the Enlightenment.

The theory of drama was important too; it was not enough to formulate rules for drama, as Boileau¹⁰ had done in seventeenth-century France, followed by Gottsched in Germany in 1730. The fundamental nature and purpose of drama had to be re-examined. Lessing, like so many of his enlightened contemporaries, had a deep respect for the Ancients. He had himself translated Plautus¹¹ and studied Aristotle's theory of drama. He shared this interest in drama with Nicolai and Mendelssohn, with both of whom he conducted a correspondence on tragedy, while Lessing's own articles on the drama appeared in a series of publications in the 1750s. The most important work was *Letters on Modern Literature*, which appeared in sections between 1759 and 1760. Diderot had said: 'Everything must be brought to light boldly, without exceptions, and unsparingly' (*Texts*, I, p.9). These three young men practised what Diderot preached. The articles on the theatre condemned adherence to French classical models, and praised Shakespeare and Lessing himself approved of the 'sentimental' comedy appearing in England and

¹⁰ Boileau (Despreaux) Nicolas (1636–1711), French critic and poet and author of *L'Art poétique* (*The Art of Poetry*, 1674).

¹¹ Titus Maccius Plautus (c.254–184 BC) Roman writer of comic plays.

France.¹² In the same year Lessing published his translation of Diderot's plays in *The Theatre of Mr Diderot* (1760).

Practice had even more impact than theory. In 1755 Lessing had published his play *Miss Sara Sampson*, first produced in Frankfurt on the Oder with great success – the audience was in floods of tears at each performance. The play was much influenced by George Lillo's *The London Merchant; or, the History of George Barnwell* (1731) and by Richardson's novels. A tragedy about a seduced girl, in a contemporary everyday setting, was an affront to those who believed that all tragedy should be in high style and noble. 'A bourgeois tragedy! My God ... what is to become of us?' was Lessing's own ironic comment.¹³

About this time too Lessing had been studying Winckelmann's *Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture* (1755) and his *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764). In 1755 he had translated du Bos's *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*.¹⁴ Lessing's own work on aesthetics was *Laoköon, or the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, in 1766, a work which came to be considered as one of the most important works on aesthetics in the eighteenth century. Winckelmann himself was impressed by Lessing's style of writing, though critical of his knowledge of the subject.

In the meantime there had been changes in Lessing's way of life. His one chance to go to England, in 1756, as travelling companion to a young businessman, Gottfried Winkler, was frustrated by the outbreak of the Seven Years' War. In 1760 he accepted the position of secretary to General Bogislaw Friedrich von Tauentzien, who was Prussian commandant in Breslau. Lessing wrote to his friends with no particular enthusiasm about the kind of life he led, but for a while his financial position improved. He could even indulge a little his love for gambling, which he could seldom afford, but in which he found excitement. Lessing fell seriously ill in Breslau and left his job before the end of the war. He had been proposed for the job of librarian in the Royal Library in Berlin, but Frederick, no doubt remembering Voltaire's complaints about Lessing, refused to consider him.

In his essay *On German Literature* (1780), Frederick the Great made no mention of Lessing and made only unfavourable general comments on German drama. Lessing's next work makes this omission even more striking. In 1767 appeared *Minna von Barnhelm*, a contemporary comedy, in which the action takes place at the end of the Seven Years' War. Goethe called it: 'The truest product of the Seven Years' War, the first

¹² Eighteenth-century views of sentiment are discussed in the Introduction to Part E of the course.

¹³ 26 April 1755 in the *Berlin Gazette*.

¹⁴ Abbé Jean-Baptiste du Bos (1670–1742) *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* (1719).

theatre production taken from real life, with a specific contemporary content'.¹⁵ It was seen at the time, and can still be seen now, as the best modern comedy of the century in German. It was an instant success on the stage, first in Hamburg, then in Berlin.

Lessing then took part in one of the most interesting experiments in the theatre of the time. A consortium of affluent citizens of the free city of Hamburg launched a 'national theatre'. Lessing was invited to become resident critic and adviser. He accepted. In this role he produced a work of lasting importance: *The Hamburg Dramaturgy* (1767). This is a collection of his reviews and commentaries. He soon had to give up writing about performances, as the actors were touchy about genuinely critical reviews, but the work continued as essays on the drama. The project failed. The directors quarrelled and there were financial problems. Lessing himself lost money heavily in a printing venture, had to sell his library, and consider what to do next.

He had made good friends in Hamburg, among them the son and daughter of Hermann Samuel Reimarus, philologist and orientalist, and a silk merchant. Engelbert König, and his wife, Eva. Englebert König died suddenly at the end of 1769, and Lessing had promised to look after his wife and children – a promise which he kept, although he had to leave Hamburg, as he had just accepted the position of Librarian at Wolfenbüttel.

Wolfenbüttel – controversial Librarian

In accepting the post of Librarian in the great library of the Duke of Brunswick in Wolfenbüttel, Lessing was giving in at last and accepting patronage. As a scholar he found the work rewarding and discovered some valuable manuscripts, (including an eleventh-century manuscript of Berengar de Tours, the discovery of which made an important contribution to church history). Yet he was lonely, isolated in a gloomy, empty castle, since the Duke's court had moved to Brunswick. He had a secure position, but he was still poor, even though he was now eminent as a writer. *Minna von Barnhelm* was being performed with great success, and his new play, a tragedy, *Emilia Galotti*, was first performed in Brunswick in 1772, and highly praised.

For Lessing personal plans became most important. Slowly his friendship with Eva König became love, and they decided to marry; but Eva, who was a woman of courage, charm and intelligence, had had to take over her late husband's business affairs, which involved lengthy journeys and long stays in Vienna. Over the years it was a friendship, then courtship by correspondence, with rare meetings. Eventually, Lessing managed to secure from the Duke of Brunswick a higher salary and a

¹⁵ Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Poetry and Truth), Part II Book 7.

house in Wolfenbüttel. They married in 1776. For one year of his life Lessing was perfectly happy; but at the end of the year Eva had a child who died, and shortly afterwards she too died. Lessing found only one way to cope with his personal tragedy, and that was to work, and work meant fighting – and fighting about fundamental religious issues which had concerned him all his life.

A few months after his wife's death, Lessing became involved in a very bitter and very public controversy. It came to a head in 1778, although it had started some years before. Publication of really controversial views on religion was still hazardous. One notable man with radical views was Professor Reimarus (1694–1768) of Hamburg, the father of Lessing's two friends. He had written an *Apologia or Plea for the Rational Worshippers of God* (*Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*, 1778). He did not venture to publish it in his lifetime. Lessing had acquired the manuscript (and was carefully evasive about how he had done so) and used his right as Wolfenbüttel Librarian to publish extracts as *Fragments of an Anonymous Author* in 1774 and 1777. Hostile comments came from critics of modest standing, to which Lessing's most notable reply was the essay 'eine Duplik' ('A Rejoinder'); but then more imposing critics joined in. Lessing's main opponent was Johann Melchior Goeze (1717–86), Chief Pastor of the Katherinenkirche in Hamburg, an orthodox Lutheran theologian and scholar. For some months in 1778 the battle was conducted, through a series of pamphlets, about criticism of revealed religion and the right to express such views. Lessing's opponents succeeded in persuading the Duke of Brunswick to withdraw the Librarian's right to publish papers, and Lessing was forbidden to publish anything more on religion. His response was to put his ideas into the play *Nathan the Wise*, which made a strong case for the unprejudiced pursuit of religious truth and for toleration.¹⁶

In 1778 Lessing had published the first part of his *Gespräche für Freymäurer* (*Ernst and Falk: Dialogues on Freemasonry*), and in 1780 he published *The Education of the Human Race* (*Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*). By then he was exhausted and ill, and wrote no more major works. He died in Brunswick in 1781.

Chronological outline of Lessing's life and main works

- 1729 born 22 January in Kamenitz, Saxony.
- 1741–6 At St Afra electoral school in Meissen.
- 1746–8 Student at University of Leipzig.
- 1748 *The Young Scholar* performed by the Neuber company.

¹⁶ There is a detailed discussion of the religious controversy in Lessing and Religion in *Religion and Humanity: Lessing's Nathan the Wise* (Studies, II).

- 1748 In Wittenberg. At the end of the year goes to Berlin.
- 1749 Writes *The Jews*.
- 1750 Journalist for the *Berlin Gazette* with his cousin Johann Christlob Mylius.
- 1751 Translation of Voltaire's *Minor Historical Works*.
- 1752 In Wittenberg obtains Master's degree.
- 1753–5 Publication of collected works in six volumes.
- 1753 Translates Marigny's *History of the Arabs*.
- 1754 *The Jews* and *The Young Scholar* published.
- 1754 Meets Friedrich Nicolai and Moses Mendelssohn.
- 1755 *Pope – a Metaphysician!* written with Mendelssohn.
- 1755 *The Freethinker* published.
- 1755 Translation of du Bos's *Critical Reflections on Poetry and Painting*.
- 1755 Miss Sara Sampson performed and published.
- 1756 Journey to England interrupted by the Seven Years' War.
- 1757 In Leipzig.
- 1758–60 In Berlin.
- 1759 *Letters on Modern Literature*.
- 1759 *Philotas – a tragedy*.
Fables
- 1760 *The Theatre of Mr Diderot*.
- 1760–5 In Breslau as secretary to General von Tauentzien.
- 1764 Serious illness in Breslau.
- 1765–7 In Berlin.
- 1766 *Laoköon or the Limits of Painting and Poetry*.
- 1767 *Minna von Barnhelm*.
- 1767–70 In Hamburg as critic and adviser for the Hamburg theatre.
- 1767 *Hamburg Dramaturgy*.
- 1769 *Antiquarian Letters*.
The Ancients' View of Death.
Friendship with the Reimarus and König families.
- 1770 Librarian of the ducal library in Wolfenbüttel.
- 1771 Engagement to Eva König.
- 1772 *Emilia Galotti*.

- 1774 Publishes first *Fragments of an Anonymous Author*.
- 1775 Journey to Leipzig, Dresden, Vienna.
Journey to Italy with Prince Leopold of Brunswick.
- 1776 Marriage to Eva König.
- 1777 Journey to Mannheim. Refuses offer to direct Mannheim theatre.
- 1778 Death of his wife Eva.
- 1778 Dispute with Chief Pastor Goeze. *Anti-Goeze* pamphlets.
- 1778 *Ernst and Falk* – dialogues for freemasons.
- 1779 *Nathan the Wise*.
- 1780 *The Education of the Human Race*.
- 1781 15 February, died in Brunswick.

Nathan the Wise

The setting of the play

The scene of the play is given as Jerusalem. The action takes place during an armistice in the Crusades. The year therefore must be 1192 at the end of the Third Crusade which lasted from 1189 to 1192. There are references in the play to Richard I (Coeur de Lion) and Philippe August II of France who were both in Palestine in 1191, and to Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, who also took part in the Crusade and was drowned in Armenia in 1190.

The Crusades were military expeditions, fostered by the Papacy, undertaken from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries by European Christians. The aim was to gain the Christian holy places in Palestine, then under Muslim occupation. After some successful military operations the Kingdom of Jerusalem was established and had then to be defended. In 1187 Sultan Saladin recaptured Jerusalem. The aim of the Third Crusade, led by the English and French kings and the German emperor, was to regain Jerusalem. The Europeans did not succeed in doing this, but Saladin made a treaty with Richard I, in effect an agreement to a three year armistice, which included permission for unarmed Christians to visit the holy places in Jerusalem.

Lessing's main historical source was François Louis Claude Marin's (1721–1809) *History of Saladin Sultan of Egypt and Syria*, (*Histoire de Saladin. Sulthan d'Egypte et de Syrie*, Paris 1758), translated into German by E.G. Küster, 1761. Lessing had himself translated Voltaire's *History of the*

Crusades in 1751 and Abbé de Marigny's *History of the Arabs* in 1753 (*Histoire des Arabes sous le Gouvernement des Califes*, Paris, 1750).

Lessing did not set out to write a historical play. He was not concerned with historical accuracy, although such details as he gives broadly fit in with the historical facts, except for some points of chronology: for example, Saladin's father, who is mentioned, was no longer alive in 1192, and it is implied in the play that Frederick Barbarossa had died many years before. There is also a quite deliberate anachronistic reference to the theatre.

Lessing's main concern was to present his parable in circumstances where Christians, Jews and Muslims could plausibly be in communication. He had made an uncompromising comment on the Crusades in the *Hamburg Dramaturgy* (Part 7): 'These Crusades, which in their inception had been a political stratagem of the Popes, in practice led to the most inhuman persecutions of which Christian superstition has ever been guilty.'

The characters

Sultan Saladin The historical Salah-el-Din lived from 1138 to 1193. He was a Kurd who first gained power in Egypt, then waged successful campaigns in Syria and Mesopotamia, and conquered Jerusalem in 1187. Saladin made a treaty with Richard I in 1192 (see above). The plan, mentioned in the play, to marry Richard's sister Johanna to Saladin's brother Melek seems to have some foundation in fact.

Sittah Saladin had a sister called Sitt-alscham (also Sillah-Alscham in Marin's history). This suggested the name to Lessing.

Nathan Lessing based the scenes with the parable of the three rings on a story in Boccaccio's *Decameron* in which a Jew named Melchisedech plays the main part. Lessing chose instead the name Nathan, an Old Testament prophet, for his principal character, as a more suitable name to use for his verse drama.

Recha was called Rahel in Lessing's first draft of the play.

Daja 'As I understand it, Daja means something like Nutrix (nurse)' Lessing noted in his draft of the play.

A young Templar The order of Knights Templar was founded in 1118, to protect pilgrims to the Holy Land. The name came from the fact that the order's base was near to what was held to be Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. The Templars took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Their uniform was a white cloak with a octagonal red cross on the breast.

A Dervish A Muhammadan mendicant monk.

The Patriarch of Jerusalem The bishop of Jerusalem. From the fifth century the bishops of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Byzantium and Jerusalem were given the rank of Patriarch. The Patriarch at the time of the Third Crusade was Heraklius, an infamous character according to Marin's *History of Saladin*.

A Lay Brother Lay brothers were not ordained, took only a vow of obedience, and carried out humbler tasks in monasteries.

An Emir An independent Muslim ruler.

Mamelukes Members of the Sultan's bodyguard.

The verse form and translation

Lessing chose to use blank verse, that is unrhymed iambic pentameters. Up to this time blank verse had been rarely used in German, but soon, in the plays of Goethe and Schiller and other dramatists, it became the verse form most often used in German drama.

Lessing was a master of vigorous, incisive prose and of dramatic language. His use of the verse in *Nathan the Wise* seems almost casual: it is clearly subordinated to the needs of the drama. It uses everyday, even colloquial language, appropriate to the different characters: the direct and simple language of the Lay Brother, the Patriarch's pious clichés, the sometimes 'romantic' language of the Templar, the changing styles of Nathan himself in different contexts. Lessing's friends pointed to much that was 'incorrect' in the early drafts, such as many lines with six or four feet instead of five. Lessing eliminated some of these, but gave priority to meaning and dramatic effect. Frequent *enjambements*¹⁷ are necessary, for the sake of the dialogue; in long sentences over many lines predicate and subject may be separated, pronouns or adverbs may not be used in the same line as the words with which they are associated. But Lessing had his own good reasons for this use of language, and remained in control. A more obviously 'poetic' feature in the play is its imagery, the recurring images of fire and water, trees and flowers – images intended to stimulate ideas and establish connections in the mind of the reader. There are biblical references or allusions, possibly more familiar to Lessing's contemporaries than to present-day readers. In the play as a whole, the flexibility of the verse, even its uneven rhythms, contribute to the intensity of its forward-moving ideas.

Inevitably much is lost in translation. The translation conveys Lessing's meaning as faithfully as possible, in a verse form which has some correspondence with Lessing's own. Complex German constructions have been simplified where this does not distort the meaning; the play on words in which Lessing delighted emerges in somewhat muted form; his juxtapositions and play on the sound of words tend to get lost, and epigrammatic phrases lose force. But the play's pace, concentrated flow of ideas, its fairly colloquial style, its general informality and humour perhaps emerge.

¹⁷ enjambement – in verse, the carrying on the sense of a line or couplet into the next.

Publication and performance

Lessing wrote *Nathan the Wise* in 1779. He arranged for it to be published and sold on subscription. Editions were then produced and sold by the publisher Voss.

There were no performances in Lessing's lifetime. The first performance was given in Berlin in 1783 by the company run by a well-known actor-manager, Döbbelin, who played the part of Nathan.

It was performed in Lübeck in 1788 and in Hamburg in 1789, and later established a place in the theatre repertoire.

Nathan the Wise was first translated into French in 1783 and into English by William Taylor of Norwich in 1790 (privately printed, and later issued for sale in 1805).

Title and epigraph

Lessing called *Nathan the Wise* 'a dramatic poem'. Voltaire had used this description for his play *The Ghebers or Tolerance* (*Les Guèbres ou la tolérance*) in 1769. Despite Lessing's criticism of Voltaire there are features of *Nathan the Wise* which have something in common with the theme of this play and others by Voltaire, *Zaire* (1732) and *Mahomet* (1742).

On the title page appears the epigraph:

Introite, nam et heic Dii sunt!

APUD GELLIUM

Enter, for here too are gods

From the works of Gellius

The reference is to the preface to *Noctes Atticae* (Attic or Athenian Nights) of Aulus Gellius, who lived c.AD 130–175.

References

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Nathan the Wise

A dramatic poem in five acts

Introite, nam et heic Dii sunt!

Apud Gellium

by

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

1779

Dramatis Personae

Sultan Saladin

Sittah, his sister

Nathan, a rich Jew in Jerusalem

Recha, his adopted daughter

Daja, a Christian but living in the house of the Jew, as Recha's companion

A young Templar

A Dervish

The Patriarch of Jerusalem

A Lay Brother

An Emir

and Mamelukes of Saladin

The scene is Jerusalem at the end of the twelfth century.

[**Note.** The lines have been numbered to correspond with those of the German text. In a few cases where the English translation is shorter, an adjustment has been made, and this is indicated against the lines in question.]

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
Nathan the Wise

Act I

Scene 1

Nathan and Daja

(Scene: A hall in Nathan's house. Nathan comes in from his journey. Daja meets him.)

DAJA He's here! It's Nathan! God be praised
 That you have come back home at last.

NATHAN	Yes, Daja, God be praised. But why <i>at last?</i>	
	Did I intend to come home any sooner?	
	Could I if I'd wished to? Babylon	5
	Is from Jerusalem at least two hundred miles	
	Away along the route I was	
	Obliged to take, with detours right and left.	
	Collecting in of debts is not a job	
	That makes a journey shorter, not something	10
	That is rushed, or quickly set aside.	

DAJA Oh Nathan,
When I think how wretched you'd have been
If you had stayed at home. Your house ...

NATHAN

Was burnt.

Yes, that I have already learned – God grant
That they have really told me everything.

15

DAJA And it was nearly totally destroyed.

NATHAN Then, Daja, we'd have simply built ourselves
Another – and a better one.

[illegible]

NATHAN My Recha, burnt to death? My Recha? 20
I had not heard that. Well then I would not
Have needed any house. So she was nearly
Burnt to death! You mean it's really true?
She's burnt to death! Just tell me now straight out!
Admit it! – kill me: torture me no longer. 25
– Yes, she's burnt to death!

DAJA	If that were so Would you be hearing it from me?	
NATHAN	Why do you terrify me then? – O Recha O, my Recha.	
DAJA	Yours? Your Recha?	
NATHAN	If ever I no longer were allowed To call this child my own!	30
DAJA	Can you call everything That you possess with equal right Your own?	
NATHAN	Nothing with greater right. All else That I possess has been bestowed on me By nature or good fortune. This alone I owe to virtue.	35
DAJA	Nathan, what a price You make me pay for all your kindness. If kindness carried out with such intent Can still deserve that name.	
NATHAN	With such intent? With what intent?	
DAJA	My conscience ...	
NATHAN	Daja, first Of all, just let me tell you what I bought ...	40
DAJA	I can't ignore my conscience ...	
NATHAN	What lovely cloth I bought for you in Babylon. So rich And yet so elegant as well. Recha Herself will scarce have any finer.	
DAJA	It's No use. For my conscience I must tell you, Will not be silenced for much longer now.	45
NATHAN	I wonder how you'll like the bracelets, earrings Necklace and the ring which I selected Just for you when I was in Damascus. I really long to know.	50
DAJA	That's so like you! Only content if you can give and give!	
NATHAN	Take gladly, as I give – and say no more!	
DAJA	No more! Who questions, Nathan, that there's none More honest and more generous than you. And yet! ...	55

NATHAN	And yet I'm just a Jew – Is that What you want to say!	
DAJA	You know much better What I want to say.	
NATHAN	Well then be quiet!	
DAJA	Very well. What happens here, that's unacceptable To God I can neither alter nor prevent. So – be it on your head! ¹⁸	60
NATHAN	Yes, be it on my head! But where is she then? Just tell me! – Daja, Are you deceiving me? Does she not know That I have come back home?	
DAJA	How can you ask? Still terror shakes her, every nerve in her, In her fantasy she still imagines fire In all she sees. Her mind's awake when she's asleep, And sleeps when she's awake – now lower Than the beasts, now higher than the angels.	65
NATHAN	Poor child! That's only human.	
DAJA	This morning She lay so long with tight shut eyes and was As dead. Then started up and cried out 'listen'! 'My father's camels are arriving home'! 'Listen, I hear his gentle voice'! And then Her eyes grew dim and then her head, which now Was not supported by her arm, fell back Onto the pillow. I went to the gate! And saw you there. You really had come home. Can you wonder at it? Her entire soul Was all this time with you – and him –	70 75
NATHAN	Him?	80
DAJA	Who is he? The man who rescued her From the fire.	
NATHAN	Who was he? Who? – Where is he? Who saved my Recha for me, who was it?	

¹⁸ Matthew 27:25. 'Then answered all the people and said. His blood be on us and on our children.'

DAJA	A young Knight Templar who, not many days Ago was brought here as a captive, then Was pardoned by the Sultan Saladin.	85
NATHAN	What? Saladin has spared a Templar's life? <i>A Templar's life?</i> Only such a miracle Could save my Recha? Oh God!	
DAJA	Without This man who boldly risked his life again Which he had just regained, she would have died.	90
NATHAN	Where is he, Daja, where's this noble man? Where is he? Let me go and kneel to him. I hope you gave him first of all, those treasures Which I left you? Gave him everything? And promised more, much more?	95
DAJA	How could we?	
NATHAN	You did not?	
DAJA	He came, no one knows from where, He went, and no one knows where to – without A knowledge of the house, and guided just By what he heard, he rushed with cloak outspread Boldly through flame and smoke to reach the voice Of someone crying 'Help!' By then we thought He must be lost – But from the smoke and flame He suddenly appeared. In his strong arms He held her safe. Coldly and quite unmoved By all our praise and thanks, he set her down, Forced his way through the crowd who waited there – And disappeared.	100 105
NATHAN	Not for ever, I should hope.	
DAJA	Afterwards for several days we saw Him walking up and down beneath the palms Which shade the Holy Sepulchre. ¹⁹ I went up to him with rapture, thanked him. Praised him, implored, besought him just once more To see the gentle pious girl who Cannot now find rest, until she's thanked him With many tears, kneeling at his feet.	110 115
NATHAN	And then?	
DAJA	In vain! Deaf to our request He poured such bitter scorn on me especially ...	

¹⁹ The grave of the resurrected Christ.

To dwell with us below a little while,
 Playing at chivalry with such ill grace,
 I'll surely find him out and bring him here. 160

DAJA It won't be easy. Nathan.

NATHAN Then perhaps
 The sweet dream will give way to sweeter truth –
 Believe me, Daja, to a human being
 A human is much dearer than an angel.
 So you will not blame me too much, I hope, 165
 When you shall see our angel-dreamer cured.

DAJA You are so good, and yet you are so bad!
 I'll go. But – listen! – look! – she's coming here herself.

Scene 2

Recha, Nathan and Daja

RECHA Father! So it *is* you, safe and sound.
 I thought it might be just your voice, sent on 170
 Ahead. Why have you stopped out here? What hills,
 What deserts and what streams divide us now?
 You're breathing in a room just next to mine
 Instead of rushing to embrace your Recha –
 Poor Recha who was meanwhile burnt to death! 175
 Or nearly burnt, just nearly. So don't shudder!
 It is a dreadful death, to burn.

NATHAN My child, my dearest child!

RECHA You must have crossed
 Euphrates, Tigris, Jordan: and who knows
 How many other rivers? – Often I 180
 Have trembled for you, until the fire came
 So near to me. But since the fire has come
 So near to me: to die in water seems
 Refreshment, comfort, and deliverance.
 And yet you are not drowned, and I have not 185
 Been burnt to death. Let us now rejoice
 And praise our God. He surely bore you and
 Your boat on wings of his unseen angels
 Across the treacherous streams. And it was God
 Who beckoned to my angel to be seen, 190
 Carrying me through the flames on his white wings.

NATHAN (On his white wings – of course!, That must have been
 The Templar's white and outspread cloak)²⁰

²⁰ The Templar's uniform was a white cloak with an octagonal red cross on the left breast.

- RECHA Visibly, *visibly*
 He bore me through the fire, protected by
 His wings. And so I saw an angel, and 195
 I saw him face to face; He was my *own*
 Angel.
- NATHAN Worthy of my Recha. And
 There's nothing fairer she would see in him
 Than he in her.
- RECHA (*smiling*)
 Whom do you flatter, father,
 The angel, or yourself?
- NATHAN Yet if he were 200
 A human – such as nature shows us every day,
 Who rendered you this service, he would seem
 To you an angel. He must and so he would.
- RECHA Not that kind of angel, no! A real one:
 He was, I'm sure, a real one! Haven't you 205
 Taught me yourself that angels really could
 Exist, and miracles are worked by God
 To benefit all those who love him truly?
 I do love him.
- NATHAN Yes, and he loves you
 And hourly he works miracles for you 210
 And those like you. So has he done for all
 Eternity.
- RECHA That makes me happy.
- NATHAN Why?
 It might sound natural and commonplace
 If he who saved you were a real Templar
 Knight; but surely that would be no less a 215
 Miracle! – The greatest miracle
 Is that those miracles which are both real and true
 Can and do become so commonplace to us.
 Without this universal miracle
 No thinking person would call miracles 220
 Those things which only seem so to a child,
 Who stares at and pursues the strangest things,
 Struck only by their novelty.
- DAJA (TO
 NATHAN) Are you
 Intending to destroy her mind, already
 So inflamed, with all this subtlety? 225
- NATHAN Patience! For my Recha isn't it a
 Miracle enough that she was rescued

By a human being who himself was earlier
 Saved by no small miracle. Indeed
 A miracle! Whoever heard of any
 Templar Knight reprieved by Saladin? 230
 Or any Templar who has asked or hoped
 That he would spare him? Or who offered more
 To him for freedom than the leather belt²¹
 Which holds his sword, or at most his dagger? 235

RECHA Father that proves my point, that he was not
 A Templar Knight. He merely looked like one –
 No Templar who was captured ever comes
 Into Jerusalem except to certain death;
 No Templar walks so freely in Jerusalem: 240
 How could any Templar have been free
 To save me in the dark?

NATHAN Why, that's well argued,
 Now, Daja, tell us. For it was from you
 That I have heard that he was sent here as
 A prisoner. I'm sure you must know more. 245

DAJA Well yes – that's what they say – but they
 Also say that Saladin has pardoned
 Him because he looks so like one of
 His brothers, one whom he loved dearly.
 But as it's more than twenty years ago now 250
 Since this brother was alive – and I don't
 Know his name – and don't know where he died,
 It all just sounds so – so incredible,
 I dare say that there's nothing in it.

NATHAN Daja, Why should such a thing be so
 Incredible? Surely not because 255
 You've chosen to believe in something *more*
 Incredible, as others do? Saladin
 Loves all his family. He might indeed
 Have loved one of his brothers in particular 260
 When he was young. And you'll agree it's true
 Two faces often look alike – are
 Impressions lost because they're old? And doesn't
 The same cause produce the same effect?
 It must. What is incredible in this? 265
 But I suppose, wise Daja, that you'd not

²¹ The belt in fact was of linen not leather, but if a Templar gave up his belt, he renounced his adherence to the order.

You might give thanks, and sigh and pray to him;
 You might dissolve in tears of ecstasy;
 You might celebrate his festivals
 By fasting, or give alms – but all that's nothing. 310
 It strikes me that your dear ones and yourselves
 Gain far more by all this than he. He won't
 Get fat from all your fasting, or get rich
 From your donations; he won't gain in splendour
 From your ecstasy, he won't be mightier 315
 By your faith. But if he were a man!

DAJA Yes, if he were a man there would be greater
 Opportunity to *do* something.
 And God knows, we were eager to serve him.
 But he wanted nothing, needed nothing 320
 From us; in himself, and with himself
 He was content, as angels are, and only
 Angels can be.

RECHA When at last he vanished ...
 NATHAN Vanished? – Really vanished? – You no longer
 Saw him walk beneath the palms? But have 325
 You really made a thorough search for him?

DAJA Well, no, we haven't.

NATHAN How's that possible?
 What's the harm, you say – you cruel dreamers! –
 Suppose this angel now – had fallen ill?

RECHA Ill?

DAJA Ill! He's surely not!

RECHA A cold chill makes 330
 Me shudder. Daja! feel my face. It was
 So warm and now it's just like ice.

NATHAN He's
 A Frank,²² who's unaccustomed to our climate.
 He's young, not hardened to the rigours of
 His order, to the hunger, sleeplessness. 335

RECHA Ill!

DAJA Nathan only means he might be.

NATHAN Lying there, with neither friends nor gold
 To buy himself some friends.

RECHA Oh father, no!

²² Since the first Crusade (1096–99), which started in France, Frank was used in the Middle East to denote all European Christians.

DAJA	Your dervish. Your old chess companion.	370
NATHAN	Al-Hafi? That's Al-Hafi?	
DAJA	He's become The Sultan's Treasurer.	
NATHAN	Is this a dream Again? It is Al-Hafi, coming here! Quick, go in. What has he got to say?	
<i>Scene 3</i>		
Nathan and the Dervish		
DERVISH	Open your eyes, as wide as they can go!	375
NATHAN	Is it you? Or isn't it? – In such fine clothes, A dervish!	
DERVISH	Well? Why not then? Do you think A dervish can't make something of himself?	
NATHAN	Well, yes, of course, – But I was thinking that A dervish – that's a real dervish – chooses To make nothing of himself.	380
DERVISH	By the Prophet, ²³ It may well be that I am no real dervish, But if one must –	
NATHAN	Must! Dervish! – A dervish must? No-one must must, ²⁴ and a dervish must. What must he then?	
DERVISH	What he is rightly asked to do And knows is good – that's what a dervish must.	385
NATHAN	By our God! You speak the truth – Let me Embrace you, man – I hope you're still my friend?	
DERVISH	And you don't ask first what I have become?	
NATHAN	In spite of that!	
DERVISH	But what if I'd become A state official in fine robes, one whose Friendship could be awkward?	390
NATHAN	If your heart Is still a dervish's, I'll take the risk. The state official's robes are just your dress.	

²³ i.e. by Mohammed! – equivalent of by God!

²⁴ 'Kein Mensch muss müssen' in the German text.

- DERVISH But even that commands respect. What do 395
You think? What would I be at *your* court?
- NATHAN Just
A dervish – nothing more. Though now I come
To think about it, probably the cook.
- DERVISH Oh yes?
I'd soon forget my skill in *your* house. Cook!
Why not the butler? See how Saladin 400
Appreciates me better – I've become
His treasurer.
- NATHAN You? For him?
- DERVISH Of
The lesser treasury – his father manages
The greater. I control the household treasury.
- NATHAN His house is great.
- DERVISH And greater than you think; 405
For every beggar is a part of it.
- NATHAN But Saladin's the enemy of beggars –
- DERVISH He's intent on getting rid of them,
Root and branch – even if he then himself
Becomes a beggar.
- NATHAN Bravo! – That's my view. 410
- DERVISH He's very near to being one by now.
Each day by dusk his treasury becomes
Much emptier than empty. For the tide
Which flows in high each morning by midday
Has flowed away –
- NATHAN For channels drain away 415
A part of it, and there's no way to fill
Or seal them up again.
- DERVISH Exactly.
- NATHAN Understood.
- DERVISH Of course it's bad enough
If princes are like vultures among carrion.
But if they're carrion among vultures 420
That is ten times worse.
- NATHAN Oh no, dervish!
Not so!
- DERVISH It's no use wasting words. So let us see
What would you offer me if I give up
My post to you?
- NATHAN What do you earn?

DERVISH	Me?	
	Not much. But you could make a handsome profit.	425
	When the treasure's at its lowest ebb –	
	You open up your floodgates – make advances,	
	And claim any rate of interest.	
NATHAN	And interest on the interest too?	
DERVISH	Of course.	
NATHAN	Until my capital is nothing more	430
	Than interest.	
DERVISH	It doesn't tempt you? Then	
	You'd better write a farewell letter to	
	Our friendship. I was really counting on you.	
NATHAN	Really? How?	
DERVISH	I thought that you might help me	
	Carry out my office with some honour.	435
	That I could use you as a source of funds –	
	You shake your head?	
NATHAN	Let's understand each other.	
	A distinction must be made. For you, Al-Hafi,	
	Why not? I'm always ready to do anything	
	To help my friend the dervish. But	440
	Al-Hafi, treasurer to Saladin,	
	To such a man ...	
DERVISH	I thought as much. You're still	
	As good as you are shrewd, and as shrewd	
	As you are wise! Be patient. Soon the two	
	Al-Hafis you distinguish will be separate	445
	Again. Look at this robe from Saladin	
	Before it's worn out, and reduced to rags,	
	Which are the proper clothing of a dervish,	
	I'll hang it on a peg here in Jerusalem,	
	And go off to the Ganges ²⁵ where, with light	450
	And naked feet, I'll tread the hot sands with	
	My teachers.	
NATHAN	Just like you!	
DERVISH	And I'll play chess	
	With them.	
NATHAN	Your highest bliss!	
DERVISH	What tempted me –	
	The prospect that my begging days were over?	

²⁵ The holy river of the Hindus.

A chance to play the rich man to the beggars? 455
 The ability to transform in a flash
 The richest beggar to a poor rich man?

NATHAN Not that, I'm sure.

DERVISH No, even more banal;
 The new experience of being flattered;
 Flattered by the Sultan's generous caprice. 460

NATHAN Which was?

DERVISH 'Only a beggar knows how beggars
 Feel; only a beggar knows, from his
 Experience, just how to give to beggars.
 Your predecessor was too cold', he said,
 'Too harsh. He was so grudging when he gave: 465
 He asked so many awkward questions first
 About the recipient. Although he knew
 There was a need, he wasn't satisfied
 Unless he knew the *cause* of need. And so
 The gift was meanly balanced with the cause. 470
 Al-Hafi won't do that. And Saladin
 With Hafi's help won't seem so niggardly.
 Al-Hafi won't be like those blocked-up water pipes
 Which spew out frothing and unclean
 The water which came in so clear and still. 475
 Al-Hafi thinks, Al-Hafi feels as I do!"
 So sweetly trilled the fowler's pipe until
 The bird was in the net! – Oh what a fool
 I am! A fool of fools!

NATHAN Gently, my dervish.

Gently!

DERVISH Isn't it plain folly, when 480
 A hundred thousand people are oppressed,
 Impoverished, despoiled, tortured, slaughtered,
 To play philanthropist to individuals?
 Isn't it foolishness to simulate
 The Almighty's mercy, which he casts impartially 485
 On good and bad, on field and desert, both
 In sunshine and in rain – to simulate it,
 But without the hand of the Almighty
 Which is always full. Don't tell me that's
 Not folly.

NATHAN That's enough, Al-Hafi!

DERVISH And 490
 My folly. Just consider that! Isn't
 It folly to detect a trace of goodness

NATHAN

DERVISH

That's what I fear.

NATHAN

But why are you in such a hurry? 500
Wait, Al-Hafi! Will your desert run
Away? If he'd just listen! – Hey, Al-Hafi, stop! –
He's gone; I really should have liked to ask
Him all about our Templar. I imagine
He must know him.

Daja and Nathan

DAJA (hurrying in)

Nathan, Nathan!

NATHAN

Well?

What is it now?

DAJA He has appeared again! He has
 Appeared again!

NATHAN

Who, Daja? Who?

DAJA

He! He!

NATHAN

He? He? – When hasn't He appeared!²⁶ – Ah yes,
For you, there's just one He. – He shouldn't be!
Not even if he were an angel!

DAJA

He's strolling up and down under the
Palms; and he picks dates from time to time.

NATHAN

And eats them too? – as if he were a Templar?

DAJA

Why tease me? – Recha's eager eyes caught sight
Of him between the dense rows of the palms
And followed him intently – now she asks you –
Pleads with you – to go and see him right away.
Hurry! She'll signal from the window
If he's coming up this way or turning
Back. Please hurry!

²⁶ For Nathan 'He' means God.

TEMPLAR	Where I was hoping now to find a modest Pilgrim's meal?	
LAY BROTHER	The tables were already Full; but come back with me now, sir.	545
TEMPLAR	Why? I haven't eaten meat for some time now. There's no need anyway. The dates are ripe.	
LAY BROTHER	Take care, sir, when you eat this sort of fruit. It doesn't do to eat too much, it blocks The spleen, and makes for melancholy blood.	550
TEMPLAR	And what if I'm inclined to melancholy? But it wasn't just to warn me about this That you were sent to me?	
LAY BROTHER	Oh no! – I'm Just supposed to find out more about you, Sound you out.	555
TEMPLAR	You tell me that yourself?	
LAY BROTHER	Why not?	
TEMPLAR	(A cunning brother, this) – And has The monastery more like you?	
LAY BROTHER	Don't know. I must obey, good sir.	
TEMPLAR	And so you just Obey and don't ask many questions then?	560
LAY BROTHER	Sir, would I be obedient otherwise?	
TEMPLAR	(That shows simplicity is always in The right!) Are you allowed to tell me who It is who wants to know me better? I would Swear it's not yourself.	
LAY BROTHER	Would it be fitting Or of use for me?	565
TEMPLAR	So who thinks it Fitting and of use to be so curious?	
LAY BROTHER	The Patriarch, I think. He sent me here To look for you.	
TEMPLAR	The Patriarch? Surely He knows the Templar's white cloak with the red cross Better than that!	570
LAY BROTHER	I do!	
TEMPLAR	Well then, brother I am a Templar and a prisoner –	

⁵² Philippe II (1165–1223), King of France, who had returned to France after the capture of Acre.

⁵² Philippe II (1165–1223), King of France, who had returned to France after the capture of Acre.

The Patriarch ... I've often asked myself
 How such a holy man, who dedicates
 His life to Heaven, at the same time can
 Demean himself to be so well informed
 Of worldly things. It must be hard for him! 635

TEMPLAR Well then? The Patriarch? –

LAY BROTHER He has precise
 And certain knowledge, how and where, and in
 What strength, and from which quarter, Saladin
 Will open his campaign, if war breaks out
 Again. 640

TEMPLAR He knows that?

LAY BROTHER Yes, and he would like
 To let King Philip know about it too;
 To enable him to calculate
 How serious a danger there might be,
 And judge if it is better to renew, 645
 At any cost, the truce with Saladin
 Which your courageous Order broke
 So recently.

TEMPLAR Some Patriarch! – I see;
 The dear brave man is asking me to be
 Not just a messenger; he wants a spy! – 650
 Good brother, kindly tell your Patriarch,
 As far as you can sound me out, I am
 The wrong man for this job. I am obliged
 To look upon myself as prisoner. 655
 The single duty of the Templar is
 To wield his sword with valour on the battlefield,
 Not espionage!

LAY BROTHER Just as I thought! –
 And I can't blame you much for that, sir.
 Yet the best is still to come. – The Patriarch 660
 Has got to know the name, and the location,
 Of the fortress in the Lebanon,³³
 Where those enormous sums are stored, which
 Saladin's far-sighted father uses
 To finance the army and equipment 665
 For the war. Now, Saladin from time
 To time visits this fortress, travelling
 Along deserted roads with little escort –
 You're with me?

³³ The German text refers to Mount Lebanon.

TEMPLAR	Never that!	
LAY BROTHER	What could be Simpler? All you have to do is capture Saladin, And make an end of him. You shudder? But already there are two God-fearing Maronites ³⁴ who have prepared To risk the deed; they only need a trusty Man to lead them there.	670
TEMPLAR	And so the Patriarch Has chosen me to be this trusty man?	675
LAY BROTHER	He thinks likely, from a base in Acre ³⁵ King Philip would be better able to Assist our cause.	
TEMPLAR	You ask me this? Me? Did you not hear me, brother, when I told You what a debt of gratitude I owe To Saladin?	680
LAY BROTHER	Indeed I heard.	
TEMPLAR	And yet?	
LAY BROTHER	The Patriarch says, That's all very well: But God and the Order	
TEMPLAR	They change nothing! They Can't order me to villainy!	
LAY BROTHER	No. But – says the Patriarch – what's Villainy To human eyes may not be villainy to God.	685
TEMPLAR	I owe my life to Saladin. And now I should take his?	
LAY BROTHER	But, says the Patriarch, Saladin is still an enemy Of Christianity who cannot ever Earn the right to be your friend.	690
TEMPLAR	My friend? Because I cannot be a villain to him? An ungrateful villain?	

³⁴ Maronites were members of the Syrian Christian Church, since 1181 associated with the Roman Church.

³⁵ Acre was conquered by Saladin in 1187, and besieged for three years by the Crusaders.

DAJA	And just returned today?	
TEMPLAR	Yesterday.	
DAJA	Recha's father came back home today. So now may Recha have some hope?	
TEMPLAR	Of what?	
DAJA	Of the request she often sends to you. Her father will invite you soon himself Most pressingly. He's come from Babylon With twenty fully laden camels, bearing Every costly thing you could imagine: Noble spices, precious stones and cloth, From India and Persia, Syria And even China.	730 735
TEMPLAR	I'm not buying anything.	
DAJA	He is honoured by his people as A prince. And yet I've often wondered why They call him 'Wise Nathan' and not 'Nathan The Rich'.	740
TEMPLAR	Perhaps to people of his race Wise and rich mean just the same.	
DAJA	But above All, he should be called 'The Good' by them. You can't conceive at all how good he is. When he found out what Recha owed to you There was nothing at that moment he would Not have done for you, or given you!	745
TEMPLAR	Oh!	
DAJA	Just come and see yourself.	
TEMPLAR	See what? How quickly Such a moment vanishes?	
DAJA	If he Were not so good, would I have been prepared To stay so long with him? Do you think I have No feeling for my own worth as a Christian? No song at my cradle prophesied That I'd accompany my husband here To Palestine with no more purpose than To educate a Jewish girl. You see, My husband served as horse soldier In Emperor Frederick's ³⁶ army –	750 755

³⁶ Emperor Frederick I (1121–90) (Frederick Barbarossa) drowned in the river Saleph in Armenia in 1190.

TEMPLAR	Yes, a Swiss By birth, who was vouchsafed the honour and The privilege of drowning in a river With his Imperial Majesty – Yes, woman! How often have you told me this before? How much longer will you persecute me?	760
DAJA	Persecute? Dear God!	
TEMPLAR	Yes, persecute. I refuse to see or hear you any More. I will not be reminded constantly Of something which I did without a thought And which remains a mystery to me When I think about it. Not that I Am anxious to regret it. But you see, Should such a thing occur again, you'd be To blame, if I were not so quick to act, If I asked questions first, and left to burn Whatever was in the flames.	765 770
DAJA	God save us!	
TEMPLAR	From Now on, do me the favour of ignoring Me. That's all I ask. And get the father Off my back. A Jew's a Jew. And I'm A blunt young Swabian. ³⁷ The image of The girl has long since left my mind, if ever It was there.	775
DAJA	But yours still lives in hers.	780
TEMPLAR	What good can come of it? What good?	
DAJA	Who knows? People are not always what they seem.	
TEMPLAR	But seldom any better. (<i>He walks away</i>)	
DAJA	Wait! Why do You rush away?	
TEMPLAR	Woman, don't make me hate These palm trees, in whose shade I've often walked.	785
DAJA	Go away, you German bear, just go – But I must not lose track of this wild beast. (<i>She follows him at a distance</i>)	

³⁷ Swabia is in south-west Germany.

Act II**Scene 1**

Saladin and Sittah

(Scene: The Sultan's Palace. Saladin and Sittah are playing chess)

SITTAH Saladin, wake up! What's happened to your game?

SALADIN No good? I thought it was.

SITTAH Not even for me.

Take that move back again.

SALADIN But why?

SITTAH Your knight 790

Is unprotected.

SALADIN Oh True. There then!

SITTAH Now I can

Play a fork.³⁸

SALADIN That's true again, so check!³⁹

SITTAH What good is that? I now move out; and you
Are as you were.

SALADIN I see I'm in a trap
I can't escape without some sacrifice. 795
Oh well! Just take the knight.

SITTAH I don't want him

I shall go past.

SALADIN That gives me nothing. For
Your strategy involves more than my knight.

SITTAH Maybe.

SALADIN Don't start counting chickens before
They're hatched. There now! How's that? That's not what you 800
Expected?

SITTAH No of course. How could I have
Expected that you'd grown so tired of
Your queen?

SALADIN Tired of my queen, you say?

³⁸ A move in which one chess piece threatens two opposing ones.

³⁹ A threat to take the King.

SITTAH	I see. Today I'll only win my thousand Dinars. ⁴⁰ Not a single Nasarin ⁴¹ more.	805
SALADIN	How so?	
SITTAH	How can you ask? Because you're trying To lose, with all your might. But my account Does not gain anything. Besides the fact That there's no pleasure in a game like this, Have I not always won more from you when I lost? When I have lost a game, you always Have consoled me afterwards by paying Double what you really owe me.	810
SALADIN	I see. So now I've beaten you it's <i>you</i> who's Lost the game on purpose, little sister?	815
SITTAH	At least, dear little brother, it may be That we should blame your generosity If I've not learned to play chess any better.	
SALADIN	But we neglect our game. Let's finish it.	
SITTAH	As you were? Check! And double check!	820
SALADIN	I admit I never noticed this Discovered check, which also takes away My queen.	
SITTAH	Could you have stopped it happening? Let's see.	
SALADIN	No, no; just take the queen away. I wasn't really happy with this piece.	825
SITTAH	Just with that piece?	
SALADIN	Away with it! It doesn't Matter. Every piece is covered once Again.	
SITTAH	My brother has instructed me Too well how courteously one must behave To queens. ⁴² (<i>She leaves the piece</i>)	
SALADIN	Then take it or don't take it! It's The only one I have.	830

⁴⁰ A Dinar was an Arabian gold coin.

⁴¹ A Nasarin was a small silver coin.

⁴² Saladin had allowed Queen Sybille to visit her captured husband, Guy de Lusignan, King of Jerusalem.

SITTAH	No need to take it. Check! Check!	
SALADIN	Go on then.	
SITTAH	Check! and check! and check!	
SALADIN	Checkmate!	
SITTAH	Not quite; your knight can move between Them; or whatever else you like. It won't Make any difference.	
SALADIN	Quite right, You've won: Al-Hafi pays. Let him be called! At once! Sittah, you weren't far wrong; I wasn't concentrating On the game: I was preoccupied. And who keeps giving us this set of faceless Pieces? ⁴³ One can't memorize them, they are Characterless. Have I been playing against The Imam? ⁴⁴ But a loss must seek excuses. I admit the shapeless pieces didn't Make me lose; it was your skill, the greater Calm and sharpness of your judgement ...	835
SITTAH	Now You want to blunt the sting of your defeat. It's just that you were more preoccupied Than even I was.	845
SALADIN	What preoccupied <i>your</i> mind?	
SITTAH	Not your preoccupation! Saladin, When shall we have a serious game again?	850
SALADIN	We'll play it yet more keenly when we do! You mean because the war restarts? Let it! I was not the first to take up arms; I wish we could extend the truce again. And at the same time I'd have liked so much To give my Sittah a good husband This must be Richard's ⁴⁵ brother; ⁴⁶ after all He is <i>Richard's</i> brother.	855

⁴³ The Koran forbids the use of images, so that strict Muslims would play with marked stones.

⁴⁴ The Imam, as the leader in a mosque, would be strict on this point.

⁴⁵ Richard I (1157–99) (Coeur de Lion).

⁴⁶ Prince John, later King John (1166–1216).

SITTAH	How you love to praise Your Richard!	
SALADIN	And if Richard's sister Had become our brother Melek's ⁴⁷ wife, Then what a dynasty that would have made! The first and best of all the world's great dynasties You hear, I'm quite prepared to praise myself As well; I think I'm worthy of my friends, What men and women would have sprung from that!	860 865
SITTAH	Have I not also smiled at this fair dream? You cannot, will not, understand the Christians. Their pride is: to be Christian, but not human. Even that mixture of humanity And superstition, which their founder gave to them, They love not for it's human values, But because Christ teaches it, Christ did it. It's well for them he was so good a human Being. And it's well for them that they Can take his virtue in good faith. And yet What virtue? Not his virtue; it's his name That must be spread throughout the world, that must Dishonour and devour the names of all Good people. For the name, the name alone, Is everything to them.	 870 875
SALADIN	You mean to say, Why else would they demand of you and Melek That each of you should bear the name of Christians ⁴⁸ If you want to love a Christian as a spouse?	880
SITTAH	Yes. As if that love, which our Creator Granted every man and woman, could Be expected only of a Christian?	885
SALADIN	Christians believe in such absurdities That they could easily believe in that. But all the same, you're wrong. The Templars, not The Christians are to blame; They are to blame As Templars, not as Christians, Just because Of them, the whole plan fails. They want Acre, Which Richard's sister was to bring as dowry To our brother Melek, and they <i>will</i> not	 890

⁴⁷ In 1192 Richard I agreed on a three-year armistice with Saladin. The marriage plan was to consolidate this.

⁴⁸ A condition was that Melek should convert to Christianity.

Let it go. In order not to lose 895
 The advantage of the knight, they play the monk,
 The foolish monk. And they could hardly wait
 Until the ending of the armistice
 To try their luck with a surprise attack.
 How splendid! Carry on dear gentlemen, 900
 Just carry on! It's all the same to me.
 If only other things went as they ought.

SITTAH Oh?
 What else has disconcerted you? What else
 Has put you out of humour so?

SALADIN The same 905
 That always put me out of humour in
 The past. I was in Lebanon with father.
 He is overwhelmed with problems.

SITTAH Oh dear!

SALADIN He cannot cope; he's hemmed in everywhere,
 He lacks so much.

SITTAH Hemmed in? What does he lack?

SALADIN What I cannot bring myself to name, 910
 Which, when I have it, seems superfluous,
 And if I don't, seems indispensable.
 Where is Al-Hafi then? Has no one gone
 To find him? Wretched and accursed money!
 Hafi! Good! I'm glad you're here.

Scene 2

The dervish Al-Hafi, Saladin and Sittah

AL-HAFI The money 915
 Has arrived from Egypt, I suppose.
 I hope there's plenty of it.

SALADIN Have you news?

AL-HAFI I? 915
 I haven't. I was thinking I'd receive
 Some news from you.

SALADIN Pay Sittah a thousand
 Dinars. (*Walking up and down thinking*)

AL-HAFI Pay instead of being paid! 920
 Just fine! that's something even less than nothing.
 To Sittah? once again to Sittah? And
 You've lost? You have lost at chess again? Is this
 The game here still?

AL-HAFI Yes, but that's not all!

Achieve? One horse, one coat, one sword, I still
Must have. And I can't gain by bargaining
With God. For he asks very little of
Me – just my heart. All I was counting on
Was any surplus from your treasury, 1010
Al-Hafi.

AL-HAFI Surplus? Tell me, would you not
Have had me run-through, or at least have had
Me strangled, if you had discovered that
I had been holding back a surplus. No
I'd rather risk embezzlement than that. 1015

SALADIN But what are we to do then? Could you not
Have borrowed first from someone else instead
of Sittah?

SITTAH Do you think I'd let him take
This privilege away from me, my brother?
And I still insist on it. I'm not
Quite bankrupt yet. 1020

SALADIN Not quite? That's the last straw!
Go off at once, Al-Hafi, make a start.
Take from anyone you can; and how you can.
Go, borrow, promise. But don't borrow from
The people I made rich. For borrowing 1025
From them might seem like taking back a gift.
Go to the greatest misers; they're the ones
Who'll gladly lend to me. They understand
How well their money prospers in my hands.

AL-HAFI I know no one like that.

SITTAH It just occurs 1030
To me that I have heard, Al-Hafi, that
Your friend has come back.

AL-HAFI (*disconcerted*)

Friend? My friend? And who
Might that be?

SITTAH The Jew you highly praised.

AL-HAFI A Jew I praised? And highly?

SITTAH To whom God – 1035
I still remember clearly the expression
Which you used about him once – to whom
His God has granted both the smallest and
The greatest of the treasures of this world
In full measure.

[illegible]

Scene 3

Sittah and Saladin		
SITTAH	He's rushing off as if he's glad to get Away from me. Why? Has he been deceived By Nathan, or are we the ones he wishes to Deceive?	1095
SALADIN	Why do you ask me? I hardly know Who you were talking of. Until today I never heard a thing about this Jew Of yours, this Nathan.	1100
SITTAH	Can it be that such A man is still unknown to you? They say He has explored the tombs of Solomon	

⁵⁰ The Mosaic law.

- And David,⁵¹ and he knows a mighty magic
 Word with which he can remove their seals. 1105
 From them he brings out to the light of day
 From time to time those untold riches which
 Could not have come from any other source.
- SALADIN If this man took his riches out of tombs
 They certainly were not from Solomon's 1110
 or David's tombs. Fools must be buried there!
- SITTAH Or scoundrels! And in any case
 His source of riches is more fruitful, and
 More inexhaustible, than a mere tomb,
 Full of Mammon.⁵²
- SALADIN He's a merchant then. 1115
- SITTAH His camels travel on all roads, and go
 Across all deserts. Nathan's ships are to
 Be found in every harbour. I was told that
 By Al-Hafi. And he added with
 Delight how great and noble was the use 1120
 His friend made of the wealth which he acquired
 With skill and energy. How nothing was
 Too small, how free his mind was from all prejudice,
 How open was his heart to every virtue,
 And how he was attuned to every beauty. 1125
- SALADIN But Al-Hafi spoke of him so coldly, so
 Uncertainly.
- SITTAH Not coldly, more embarrassed,
 As if he thought it dangerous to praise him,
 But did not want to be unjustly critical.
 Or could it be that, even though he is 1130
 The best of all his people he cannot
 Help being one of them? Perhaps Al-Hafi
 Feels ashamed of him in this respect.
 Well, be that as it may. It doesn't matter
 If the Jew is more or less like other 1135
 Jews. He's rich, and that's enough for us.
- SALADIN But surely, sister, you do not intend
 To take what's his by force?
- SITTAH What do you mean
 By force? With fire and sword? Of course not. With

⁵¹ A reference to a legend that treasures were buried in these graves.

⁵² Mammon-riches.

The weak the only kind of force one needs 1140
 Is their own weakness. Now just come with me
 To hear a singer in my harem whom
 I purchased only yesterday. Perhaps
 Meanwhile I can work out a strategy
 I have for dealing with this Nathan. Come! 1145

Scene 4

Recha, Nathan and Daja

(Scene: In front of Nathan's house, where it meets the palm trees. Recha and Nathan come out. Daja joins them.)

RECHA Father, you have been so long. There's little 1146
 Chance of meeting him by now.

NATHAN Well, well;
 If we've missed him here, beneath the palms,
 We'll see him somewhere else. Be calm now. Look!
 Is that not Daja coming to us?

RECHA She 1150
 Will surely have lost sight of him by now.

NATHAN I doubt it.

RECHA Then she would be walking faster.

NATHAN Probably she hasn't seen us.

RECHA Now
 She's seen us.

NATHAN Look, she's coming twice as fast.
 So just calm down.

RECHA You wouldn't really want 1155
 A daughter who was calm at such a moment?
 Who did not want to know to whose good deed
 She owes her life? Her life which she loves only
 Because she owes it first of all to you.

NATHAN I wouldn't want you different from what 1160
 You are; not even if I understand
 That something new is stirring in your soul.

RECHA What, father?

NATHAN You ask me so shyly? That
 Which now develops in your inmost heart
 Is innocence and nature. Let it cause you 1165
 No distress. It causes none to me.
 But promise one thing to me; if your heart
 Declares itself more openly, don't hide
 Its wishes from me.

His good, defiant look, and his firm step.
 However bitter is his shell, the kernel
 Cannot be. Where have I seen his like?
 Forgive me, noble Frank.

TEMPLAR What?

NATHAN Please allow me.

TEMPLAR What, Jew, what?

NATHAN To venture to address you. 1200

TEMPLAR How can I prevent it? But you'd better
 Make it short.

NATHAN Please wait. Don't rush away
 So proudly and contemptuously from
 A man who is forever in your debt.

TEMPLAR How's that? Ah, I believe I know. You are ... 1205

NATHAN My name is Nathan. I'm the father of
 The girl you generously rescued from
 The fire. I've come ...

TEMPLAR To thank me? But I have
 Already had to suffer too much thanks
 For this mere trifle. As for you, you owe 1210
 Me nothing. After all I did not know
 That this girl was your daughter. And it is
 The duty of the Templar Knights to spring
 To the assistance of all people in
 Distress. In any case my life was at 1215
 That moment burdensome to me. So I
 Was very glad to seize the opportunity
 To put my life at risk to save another.
 Even if the life I saved might be
 As unimportant as this Jewish girl's. 1220

NATHAN A great and dreadful thing! I think
 I understand. Your modest greatness hides
 Behind such dreadful words in order
 To escape from admiration. All the same 1225
 If admiration meets with your contempt
 What can we offer that you would find less
 Despicable? Sir, if you weren't a stranger
 Here, a prisoner, I would not be
 So bold in asking you. Give your command:
 How can we serve you?

TEMPLAR You? with nothing.

NATHAN	I'm	1230
	A man with riches.	
TEMPLAR	But a richer Jew Is not a better Jew to me.	
NATHAN	But even so Could you not make use of all the good Things which he has? Could you not use his riches?	
TEMPLAR	Well, I won't reject that out of hand, If only for the sake of my old cloak. As soon as it wears out, and neither seam Nor tatter holds together any longer, Then I'll borrow cloth or money from you For a new one. But don't look so black! You're still quite safe. It isn't that far gone. You can see it's still in quite good Condition. Only this one corner has An ugly mark: that's where it has been singed. That happened when I carried out your daughter Through the fire.	1235 1240 1245
NATHAN	<i>(takes hold of the corner of the cloth and looks at it)</i> How strange it is that such An evil stain, the mark of fire, should give A man a better testimonial Than his own mouth. And I would like to kiss This mark. Ah! Pardon me! I couldn't help it.	
TEMPLAR	What?	
NATHAN	A tear fell on it.	
TEMPLAR	Never mind. There have been many drops before. (This Jew Is disconcerting.)	
NATHAN	I wonder if you would Be very kind and let your cloak be taken Some time to my daughter?	
TEMPLAR	For what reason?	1255
NATHAN	So she may press her lips upon this mark. For I suppose her wish to fall upon Her knees in front of you is now in vain.	
TEMPLAR	But Jew, – your name is Nathan? Nathan then, You frame your words with skill, and very pointedly I am embarrassed – anyway – I would ...	1260
NATHAN	React and play a part, just as you wish.	

- I'll still see through it. You were far too good
And honest to be more polite. The girl
Was all emotion; while the woman messenger 1265
Was too insistent, and the father, far
Away. You were concerned for her good name.
You fled, to save her from an ordeal or defeat.
I thank you for that too.
- TEMPLAR I see you know
The way in which we Templars ought to think. 1270
- NATHAN Why only Templars? And why *ought* to think?
Because it is commanded by the Order?
I know how all good people think, and that
Good people are produced in every land.
- TEMPLAR And yet, I hope, with differences.
- NATHAN Of course 1275
They're different in colour, dress, and build.
- TEMPLAR In one place more, and in another less.
- NATHAN These differences don't amount to much.
Everywhere a great man needs much space,
When several are planted close together 1280
They just break each others' branches. Average
Men like us are countless everywhere.
And yet each one must tolerate the rest,
And yet one gnarled branch must accept another.
And yet no single treetop must presume 1285
That it alone did not spring from the ground.
- TEMPLAR Well spoken! But you also know the race
Which first evolved this petty, carping view
Of humankind? You know which people was
The first to call itself the chosen people,⁵³ Nathan? 1290
I don't exactly hate this people, but
I cannot help despising them for all
Their pride. Their pride, which they passed down to
Christian and to Muslim, that their God alone
Is the true God!. You are amazed that I, 1295
A Christian and a Templar, speak like this?
When and where has pious fury claimed
More stridently to have the better God,
And to impose it on the whole world as

⁵³ Deuteronomy 7:6. 'The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth.'

- The best? Where has it shown itself in blacker
Form than here, and now? Can anybody,
Here and now, be so blinkered ... Leave
Them to their blindness! Just forget what I
Have said, and let me be. (*He is about to go*) 1300
- NATHAN Ah, you don't know
How much more firmly I shall press myself
Upon you now. We really must be friends. 1305
Despise my people if you wish. But neither
Of us chose our people. Are we then
Our people? What does 'people' mean?
Are Jew and Christian, Jew and Christian first 1310
And human beings second? Have I found
In you a man who needs no other name
Than human being?
- TEMPLAR Yes, by God, You're right!
Nathan give me your hand. I am ashamed
That I misjudged you even for a moment. 1315
- NATHAN I'm proud of it. For only common things
Are recognised at once.
- TEMPLAR But what is rare
Is harder to forget. Nathan, of course
We must, we must be friends.
- NATHAN We are already.
How my Recha will rejoice at this! 1320
And what a joyful prospect opens up
Before my eyes! Just get to know her first.
- TEMPLAR I already long to do so. Who is that
Who rushes from your house. Is it not Daja?
- NATHAN Yes, and she looks anxious.
- TEMPLAR Let us hope 1325
Our Recha is all right.

Scene 6

Nathan, Templar and Daja

- DAJA Nathan, Nathan!
- NATHAN Well?
- DAJA Forgive me, noble knight, for interrupting
You.
- NATHAN What is it?

- TEMPLAR Yes, what is it?
- DAJA The Sultan sends for you. The Sultan wants
To speak to you. My God, the Sultan!
- NATHAN Me? 1330
- The Sultan? I expect he wants to see
What new things I've brought back. Just tell him that
Little – almost nothing – is unpacked.
- DAJA No, no, he won't see anything. He wants
To speak to you in person, and as soon 1335
As possible.
- NATHAN I'll come. Go in, go in!
- DAJA Please do not be offended, noble knight –
God, we are so worried about what
The Sultan wants.
- NATHAN We'll soon find out. Just go!

Scene 7

Nathan and the Templar

- TEMPLAR So you don't know him yet? I mean in person? 1340
- NATHAN Saladin? Not yet. I've not avoided
Meeting him, but never sought him out.
The general report spoke so much good
Of him that I preferred believing it
To meeting him himself. But if it's true 1345
That he, by granting you your life ...
- TEMPLAR Quite right.
At least that's true. The life which I'm now living
Is his gift.
- NATHAN And with this gift he's given
Me a double, threefold life. It changes
Everything between us. All at once 1350
It threw a rope around me, so that I
Am bound forever to his service, now.
I can scarcely, scarcely wait to hear
What he will first command me. I am ready
To do anything. And I am ready 1355
To admit I do it for your sake.
- TEMPLAR I've had no chance to thank him for myself yet,
Even though I've often crossed his path.
The impression which I made on him
Came suddenly, and disappeared as fast. 1360

Who knows if he remembers me at all.
 And yet he must remember me again.
 Once more at least; for he must finally
 Decide my fate. It's not enough that I
 Still live at his command, and at his will. 1365
 I now must learn from him according to
 Whose will I have to live my life henceforth.

NATHAN Exactly; one more reason why I won't
 Delay. Perhaps a word may give me a chance
 To mention you. Forgive me, I must hurry. 1370
 But when shall we see you at our house?

TEMPLAR As soon as you allow.

NATHAN Or you would like.

TEMPLAR Today then.

NATHAN And your name, if I may ask.

TEMPLAR My name was – is – Curd von Stauffen. Curd.

NATHAN Von Stauffen? – Stauffen? – Stauffen?

TEMPLAR Why are you 1375
 So struck by that?

NATHAN Von Stauffen? – There must be
 Some other families of that name ...

TEMPLAR Oh yes, there were
 More of them – and some rot here to this day.
 My uncle himself – my father, I should say –
 Why are you looking at me more and more 1380
 Intently?

NATHAN Nothing, nothing. It's just that
 I cannot tire of seeing you.

TEMPLAR Then I
 Shall leave you first. The eyes of one who seeks
 Have often found more than he wished to find.
 I fear them, Nathan. Let time, and not curiosity, 1385
 Develop our acquaintance step by step. *(He goes out)*

NATHAN *(Looking after him in astonishment)*
 'The eyes of one who seeks have often found
 More than he wished to find'. It is as if
 He read my mind. It really is. And yet
 It could be possible. He has not only 1390
 Wolf's build, Wolf's walk – his voice too is the same
 Wolf even used to toss his head like that.

Wolf held his sword as he does, and like him
 He also stroked his eyebrows with his hand,
 As if to hide the fire in his eyes. 1395
 How such images, so deeply etched,
 Can sometimes sleep in us, until a single
 Word, a sound, awakens them. Von Stauffen –
 Right, that's right! Von Filnek and Von Stauffen.
 Soon I'll find out more about that, soon, 1400
 But first to Saladin. What's this? Is that
 Not Daja lurking there? Come closer, Daja.

Scene 8

Daja and Nathan

NATHAN I suppose that both of you are bursting to
 Discover something very different from
 Why the Sultan wants to see me.
 DAJA Can 1405
 You blame her? You had just begun to talk
 To him more confidentially, when we
 Were driven from the window by the Sultan's
 Messenger.
 NATHAN Just tell her then, she may
 Expect him any moment.
 DAJA Really? Really? 1410
 NATHAN I hope I can rely upon you Daja?
 Please be on your guard. You won't have any
 Reason to regret it, and your conscience
 Will be satisfied by this. But please
 Do nothing to disrupt my plan. Just talk 1415
 And ask your questions with discretion and
 Restraint ...
 DAJA I hardly need reminding of
 That. I'm going; you must go yourself.
 But look! I do believe a second messenger
 Has come from Saladin, your dervish, Al-Hafi. (*Exit*) 1420

Scene 9

Nathan and Al-Hafi

AL-HAFI There you are! It's you I've come to see.
 NATHAN Why this urgency? What does he want
 Of me?

Perhaps you might imagine that a man
 Who needs your money would consider taking
 Your advice? You really think so? Saladin
 Accept advice! When has he taken any
 Advice? You can't imagine, Nathan, what
 Occurred just now when I was with him. 1450

NATHAN Well? 1455

AL-HAFI I came to him just after he had played
 Chess with his sister. Sittah doesn't play
 So badly. And the game, which Saladin
 Believed he'd lost, and had conceded, was
 Still set out, untouched. I take a look, 1460
 And see the game is very far from lost.

NATHAN That must have been a lucky find for you!

AL-HAFI All that he had to do was to move the king
 Behind the pawn, and out of check. If I
 Could only show you!

NATHAN I believe you. 1465

AL-HAFI Then the rook was free to move – and she
 Was lost. I wanted to explain it to him.
 I called him. Guess what?

NATHAN And he disagreed?

AL-HAFI He wouldn't even listen, but with scorn
 He turned the whole game over.

NATHAN How could he? 1470

AL-HAFI He said he *wanted* to be checkmate anyway.
 He wanted to! You call that playing chess?

NATHAN No, playing *with* the game.

AL-HAFI And it was worth
 A pretty penny.

NATHAN Money, money, money!
 That's the least of it. But to refuse 1475
 To listen to Al-Hafi, and to shut
 His ears to you on such a weighty point,
 Not to appreciate your eagle eye:
 That cries aloud for vengeance, does it not?

AL-HAFI Now, now, I'm only telling you all this 1480
 So you can see what sort of head he has.
 In short, I cannot stand him any longer.
 So I've been chasing all the Moorish sharks
 And asking who will make a loan to him.

I, who've never begged a penny for
Myself, must borrow for another. Borrowing
Is much the same as begging, just as lending
For the interest is much the same
As stealing. With my Ghebers⁵⁴ on the Ganges
I don't need either, and I need not be
The tool of either. On the Ganges, on
The Ganges, only there are human beings.
You alone, of all those here, are worthy
To live beside the Ganges. Will you come
With me? Leave all your trash to him and let
Him deal with it. He'll get it from you
Anyway by degrees. This way you'll lose
Your burden all at once. I'll get a delk⁵⁵
For you. Come on!

NATHAN I think we'll always have
This choice, Al-Hafi, but I want to think 1500
It over. Wait ...

AL-HAFI What? Think about it?
No thought is needed for a thing like this.

NATHAN But only till I get back from the Sultan;
Until I've said goodbye ...

AL-HAFI	Whoever thinks	
About it seeks excuses not to act.		1505
If he can't instantly decide to live		
Just for himself, he'll always be a slave		
To others. As you wish. Farewell. Just as		
You like. I'll go my way, you go yours.		

NATHAN Al-Hafi! You will put your own affairs
 In order first? 1510

AL-HAFI Oh nonsense! Any cash
That's left is hardly worth the counting. My
Accounts are guaranteed by you or Sittah.
Farewell! (*Exit*)

NATHAN (*looking after him*)
 I'll guarantee them. Wild, good, noble –
 How can I describe him? In the end,
 A real beggar is the only real king!
 (*Exit the other side.*)

1515

⁵⁴ Ghebers – Persian name for followers of Zoroaster, also called Parsees (see Act II, Sc.2).

⁵⁵ delk – the Arabian name for the dervish dress.

Pointless to resist.

DAJA The ways of Heaven are the ways of Heaven.
And suppose your Templar were to be

The means by which his God, for whom he fights, 1550
Intends to lead you to the land and to
The people for whom you were born?

RECHA

O Daja!

What are you saying yet again, dear Daja!
You really do have most peculiar
Ideas! 'His God, *his* God for whom he fights.' 1555
To whom does God belong? What sort of God
Belongs to just one person? One who needs
People to fight for him? And how can we
Know which bit of earth we have been born for,
Unless it is the one *on* which we have 1560
Been born? If father were to hear you talk!
What has he done to you that you must always
See my happiness so far from him?
What has he done to make you want to mix
The seed of pure reason,⁵⁶ which he planted 1565
In my soul, with weeds or flowers of
Your homeland? Dear, beloved Daja, he
Does not want your brightly coloured flowers
In my soil now; and I have to tell you
That however beautifully they 1570
May cover it, I feel my soil has been
So weakened, so impoverished by all
Your flowers; in their scent, their sweet-sour scent
I feel so dizzy and so numb. – Your brain
Is more accustomed to this. I don't blame you 1575
For your stronger nerves, which can endure it.
But it's not for me. As for your "Angel" –
Did it not so very nearly make a fool
Of me? This nonsense makes me feel ashamed
In front of my own father.

DAJA

Nonsense? – as if

This place were blessed with reason! Nonsense!
If only I could speak! 1580

RECHA

Are you not free

To speak? Did I not always listen when
You chose to talk to me about the heroes
Of your own religion? Have I ever 1585
Failed to admire their deeds, to shed tears gladly
For their sufferings? It's true, I did not

⁵⁶ Matthew 13:24. 'The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field.'

Think their faith the most heroic quality
 In them. What I found more consoling was
 The lesson that devotedness to God 1590
 Does not wholly depend on what
 We speculate about him. Dear Daja,
 My father has so often told us that;
 And you have often said that you agreed
 With him. So why do you now undermine 1595
 Alone what you have built with him
 Together? – Dear Daja, this is not the best
 Discussion to be having while we're waiting
 For our friend. For me, of course, it is.
 To me it matters very much if he too ... 1600
 Listen Daja! – Someone's at our door.
 Suppose it's he! Just listen!

Scene 2

Recha, Daja and the Templar

(Someone has opened the door for the Templar with the words:)

Come this way.

RECHA *(Starts, composes herself and is about to fall at his feet)*
 It is he! – My saviour!

TEMPLAR It was to avoid this
 That I did not come before. But –

RECHA At
 The feet of this proud man, I just want, once 1605
 Again, to thank God; not to thank the man.
 The man does not want thanks; he wants them just
 As little as the water pail which worked
 So hard in putting out the fire. It let
 Itself be filled and emptied with no thought 1610
 For you or me. The man is like that too.
 He too was simply thrust into the blaze;
 And quite by chance I stayed there in his arms,
 As if I were a spark upon his cloak. 1615
 Until something – who knows what? – at last
 Propelled us from the blaze. Is this a cause
 For thanks? In Europe wine is capable
 Of spurring men to every kind of deed.
 It's just that Templars sometimes have to act 1620/1
 Like this. Like rather well-trained dogs they must
 Retrieve things out of fire or out of water.

TEMPLAR *(who has been watching her in uneasy astonishment)*
 Oh Daja, Daja! Just because at moments

Of distress and bitterness my temper
 May have given you offence, why did you pass on 1625
 Every stupid word that I let slip?
 Daja, your revenge on me was too severe!
 I hope that from now on you'll represent
 Me to her better.

DAJA But I think, sir, if
 I'm right, that all these little stings which pricked 1630
 Her heart will not have done you any harm
 At all.

RECHA What? You were in distress? So then
 You were more miserly with your distress
 Than with your life.

TEMPLAR My good, sweet child! –
 How much my soul is torn between my eyes 1635
 And ears! – You can't have been the girl, no, no,
 It cannot have been you I rescued from
 The fire. For how could anyone who knew you
 Not have saved you from the fire? Who would
 Have waited for me? – Yet – fear changes things. 1640
(Pause while he seems lost in thought, looking at her)

RECHA And yet I find that you are still the same –
(Pause, until she goes on, to stop him looking at her)
 Now, Sir, perhaps you'll tell us where you've been
 So long? And I might also dare to ask –
 Where are you now?

TEMPLAR I am – where I perhaps
 Should not be.

RECHA Where were you before? Perhaps 1645
 Again where you should not have been? That is
 Not good.

TEMPLAR On – on – what is the mountain called?
 On Sinai.

RECHA On Sinai? – Oh good!
 At last I can find out for certain whether
 It is true.

TEMPLAR What? Whether it is true 1650
 That you can see there still the place where Moses
 Stood before God,⁵⁷ where –

⁵⁷ Exodus 19:2–3. 'They were come unto the desert of Sinai ... and Moses went up unto God and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain.'

1685

TEMPLAR Oh no. He is expecting me to come,
Not you. And he might easily – who knows? –
He might easily at Saladin's –
You don't know the Sultan – he might well
Get into trouble. So there's danger if 1690
I stay, believe me.

RECHA Danger? But what danger?

TEMPLAR Danger for me, for you, for him, if I
Don't go this minute. (*Exit*)

Scene 3

Recha and Daja

RECHA What has happened, Daja? –
Why so quickly? What's come over him?
Why's he rushing off?

DAJA Just let him go. 1695
I think it's no bad sign.

RECHA A sign? Of what?

DAJA That something's going on inside him. It
Is simmering, but it must not boil over.
Leave him. Now it's your turn.

RECHA My turn? You
Are as mysterious as he is.

DAJA Soon 1700
You will be able to repay him for
The unrest which he caused you. But you won't
Be too severe, too full of thoughts of vengeance?

RECHA I suppose you know exactly what you mean.

DAJA Have you calmed down so much already. Recha? 1705

RECHA Yes, I have, I have ...

DAJA At least admit
To me that you are pleased by his unrest.
The calmness which you now enjoy is owed
To his unrest.

RECHA I'm not aware of that. 1710
The most I can admit to you is that
It does seem very strange to me to find
That such a storm within my heart should be
So quickly followed by such stillness. Now
His whole appearance, and his speech, his tone,
Have ...

DAJA Satisfied you straight away?

- RECHA I won't 1715
Say satisfied – no – not by a long way –
- DAJA Only calmed the burning hunger.
- RECHA Yes,
You could say that.
- DAJA But I don't.
- RECHA I shall
Always treasure him, more dearly than
My life; although my pulse no longer races 1720
When I hear his name, although my heart
No longer beats with greater speed and vigour
When I think of him. But why this chatter?
Come, dear Daja, come back to the window
Which looks out on to the palms.
- DAJA Your burning 1725
Hunger is not yet entirely stilled.
- RECHA Now I shall see the palms again, not just
The man who walks beneath them.
- DAJA But this coldness
May be just the start of a new fever.
- RECHA What coldness? I'm not cold. Truly I see 1730
With no less pleasure what I can see calmly.

Scene 4

Saladin and Sittah

(Scene: An audience room in the Sultan's palace)

- SALADIN *(as he comes in, standing by the door)*
Bring the Jew in here when he arrives.
He doesn't seem to be in any haste.
- SITTAH Perhaps he was not there, could not be found
At once.
- SALADIN Oh Sister! Sister!
- SITTAH You behave 1735
As if you're ready for a battle.
- SALADIN One
With weapons which I have not learned to use.
To play a part, to make someone afraid,
Set traps for him, to lead him on thin ice.
When could I do that? When ever did 1740
I learn to do it? What is it all for?
What for? To fish for money! Just for money,
To scare a Jew and make him give me money!

- For that I'm to resort to petty tricks,
All for the sake of the most trivial
Of trifles? 1745
- SITTAH Every trifle takes revenge
If you despise it, brother.
- SALADIN Sad, but true.
Suppose this Jew should really be the good
And reasonable man described to you
By Al-Hafi recently.
- SITTAH And if he is? 1750
There's no need for trickery. The snare
Is for a Jew who's anxious, miserly
And fearful, not for such a good, wise man.
He's already ours without the snare.
And there's some pleasure in observing how 1755
A man like that can extricate himself.
Whether he can quickly tear the rope
Apart with his audacious strength, or how
He will manoeuvre cunningly to wriggle
Past the net; this is a pleasure which 1760
You'll have in any case.
- SALADIN That's true. Of course
I'm looking forward to it.
- SITTAH So there's nothing else
To worry you at all. For if he's just
Like all the others, if he's no more than
A Jew, like any other Jew, you need not 1765
Be ashamed of seeming just as he
Thinks all men are. Besides in his eyes someone
Who appears to be a better man
Is just an ass, a fool.
- SALADIN And so my bad
Behaviour will prevent a bad man thinking 1770
Badly of me?
- SITTAH If you call it bad,
To use a thing according to its nature.
- SALADIN You women always make your wily plans
Seem better than they are.
- SITTAH What do you mean?
- SALADIN But I'm afraid my clumsy hands will break 1775
So fine and delicate a scheme. It must
Be executed as it was conceived:
With cunning and dexterity. However

- That may be, I'll dance as best I can,
And I would rather do it worse than better. 1780
- SITTAH Do not underestimate yourself!
I know you'll win, if only you're determined.
Men like you would so much like to make
Us think that your success in life depends
Upon your sword, your sword and nothing else. 1785
When he goes hunting with the fox, the lion
Is ashamed – but of the fox, not of
His cunning.
- SALADIN And a woman always likes
To drag men to her level! Leave me now.
I think I've learned my lesson well enough. 1790
- SITTAH What? Must I go?
- SALADIN Did you intend to stay?
- SITTAH If not to stay – at least where I can see –
Here in the ante-room.
- SALADIN To eavesdrop there?
Not even that, my sister, if I'm to
Succeed. Now go! The curtain rustles; here 1795
He comes! Don't linger there. I shall be watching.
*(While she goes through one door, Nathan comes in the other and
Saladin has sat down)*

Scene 5

Saladin and Nathan

- SALADIN Come closer, Jew – closer – right up to me.
Don't be afraid.
- NATHAN That's for your enemies!
- SALADIN You call yourself Nathan?
- NATHAN Yes.
- SALADIN The wise Nathan?
- NATHAN No.
- SALADIN You may not; but the people do. 1800
- NATHAN The people! Possibly.
- SALADIN You surely don't
Believe that I despise the people's voice?
For some time now I've wished to meet the man
Whom all the people call the Wise.
- NATHAN And if
They call him that in mockery? If wise 1805

- Means to the people nothing more than shrewd,
And shrewd just means aware of his own interest.
- SALADIN You mean his own *true* interest, I presume?
- NATHAN Then the most selfish man would be the shrewdest.
Then shrewd and wise would be the same.
- SALADIN I hear 1810
You proving what you wish to contradict.
Humanity's true interest, which the people
Cannot understand, *you* understand.
At least you've tried to understand it.
You have reflected on it. That alone 1815
Makes a man wise.
- NATHAN But everybody thinks
He's wise.
- SALADIN That's quite enough of modesty!
To hear this all the time when what I seek
For is sober reason fills me with disgust.
(*He gets up quickly*)
Now let's come straight to the point. But, first of all 1820
Be honest with me, Jew! Be honest!
- NATHAN Sultan
You can rely on me. I'll serve you, and
Prove worthy of your further patronage.
- SALADIN You'll serve me? How?
- NATHAN I promise you the best
Of everything, and at the cheapest price. 1825
- SALADIN What are you talking about? Surely not
About your goods? My sister may well haggle
With you sometime. (That's in case she's listening!)
I have no business with you as a merchant.
- NATHAN In that case, I expect you want to know 1830
What news about the enemy I gathered
On my travels. It is true the enemy
Is active once again, and to be frank ...
- SALADIN No, that was not my aim in meeting you.
I know already everything I need 1835
To know of that. – In short –
- NATHAN Command me, Sultan.
- SALADIN I want your teaching on another subject.
Something quite different. Since you are so wise,
Tell me, what kind of faith, what kind of law
Has seemed most plausible to you?

Like someone bursting through the door. But when
 You're visiting a friend, you knock and listen
 First. I must be on my guard. But how?
 I can't insist that I'm a Jew; but to 1885
 Deny that I'm a Jew would be still worse.
 Then he could simply ask, "If not a Jew,
 Why not a Muslim?" That's it! That can save me!
 It's not just children who can be fobbed off
 With fairy tales. He's coming. Let him come! 1890

Scene 7

Saladin and Nathan

SALADIN (And so the coast is clear) – I hope I've given
 You enough time for reflection. Have
 You finished ordering your thoughts? Speak!
 Not a soul can hear us.

NATHAN I don't mind
 If the whole world were to hear us.

SALADIN Nathan 1895
 Is so certain of his case? That's what I call
 A wise man! One who never hides the truth.
 A man who, for its sake, will gamble everything
 His blood and land, life and limb.

NATHAN Yes, if it's needed and of use.

SALADIN I hope 1900
 I may in future earn the right to bear
 One of my titles: "The Reformer of the World
 And of the Law."

NATHAN A truly splendid title!
 But before I tell you all my thoughts,
 Sultan, would you allow me to relate 1905
 A little tale?

SALADIN Why not? I've always loved
 To listen to a story, if it is
 Well told.

NATHAN I must confess I'm not the man
 To tell it very well.

SALADIN Your pride and modesty
 Again! Go on, just tell the story, now. 1910

NATHAN Once long ago, a man lived in the East
 Who had a ring of priceless worth, a gift

From someone dear to him. The stone was opal,
 Shot through with a hundred lovely colours.
 The ring had secret power to gain favour⁵⁸ 1915
 In the sight of God and humankind⁵⁹
 For anyone who wore it and who trusted
 In its power. No wonder that the man
 Would never take it from his finger; and
 He made provision that the ring should stay 1920
 Forever in his dynasty. And so
 He left it to the dearest of his sons,
 With firm instructions that he, in his turn,
 Should leave it to the son he loved the most.
 In this way, by the power of the ring, 1925
 Without respect of birth, the dearest son
 Should always be the master of the house.
 You understand me, Sultan?

SALADIN Yes, go on!

NATHAN And so the ring passed down from son to son,
 Until it reached a father of three sons. 1930
 All three alike were dutiful to him.
 And he was therefore bound to love all three
 Sons equally. And yet, from time to time,
 When each in turn was with him on his own,
 And did not have to share his overflowing heart 1935
 With his two brothers, then the one who stood
 Before him seemed most worthy of the ring.
 And thus by loving weakness he was led
 To promise it to each of them in turn.
 So matters rested for a while, until 1940
 The father's death drew near; and then the worthy
 Man was in a quandary. He could
 Not bear to hurt two of his sons, who'd trusted
 In his word. So what was he to do?
 He sent in secret for a craftsman who 1945
 Was ordered to devise two further rings,
 Exactly on the pattern of his own,
 Whatever cost or effort was required,
 To make each ring precisely like the first.
 The craftsman did well. When he brought the rings 1950

⁵⁸ Luke 2:52. 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.'

⁵⁹ (and I Samuel 2:26).

- The father was unable to distinguish
The original. With joyful heart
He called his sons, but each one on his own.
To each he gave his blessing and his ring.
And then he died. – You hear me, Sultan?
- SALADIN (*turns away disconcerted*) Yes, 1955
I hear! – Just finish off your fairy tale.
I hope you're near the end.
- NATHAN That is the end.
It's obvious what follows. Scarcely had
The father died, than each comes with his ring,
And each one claims to be the master of 1960
The house. There are enquiries, arguments,
Complaints. In vain. There was no way to prove
Which ring was true.
(*After a pause in which he waits for the Sultan's answer*)
Almost as hard as now
For us to prove the one true faith.
- SALADIN Is this
To be the answer to my question?
- NATHAN I 1965
Apologize – I cannot trust myself
To tell the difference between the rings,
Because the father had them made precisely
So that no one could distinguish them.
- SALADIN The rings! – Don't play with me! I should have thought 1970
That the religions which I named to you
Were easy to distinguish. Even by
Their clothing; even down to food and drink.
- NATHAN But not the grounds on which they rest.
For are they not all based on history, 1975
Handed down or written? History
We take on trust, on faith. Is that not true? 1977/8
In whose good faith can we most put our trust?
Our people's, those whose blood we share, and who, 1980
From childhood on have proved their love for us,
Who never have deceived us, save, perhaps,
When it was good for us to be deceived?
Can I believe less in my ancestors
Than you believe in yours? Or vice versa, 1985
Can I demand of you that you accuse
Your own forebear of lies, just so that I
Don't contradict my own? – or vice versa. 1988/9
The same is true of Christians, isn't it? 1990

- SALADIN (Upon my life! The man is right.
I must be silent.)
- NATHAN Let us now come back
To our three rings. I said before: the sons
Accused each other, each swore to the judge
He had received his ring directly from 1995
His father's hand – and it was true. – And he'd
Been promised by his father long ago
That one day he would have the privileges
Of the ring – and that was also true.
The father, each declared, could not have been 2000
So false to him; and rather than allow
Suspicion of deceit to fall on his
Beloved father; he preferred to charge
His brothers with deceit, although he would
In general believe only the best 2005
Of them; and vowed that he would find a way
To expose the traitors and to take revenge.
- SALADIN And what about the judge? I want to hear
What you will make him say to this. Go on!
- NATHAN The judge pronounced: Unless you bring your father 2010
Here to me at once, I shall dismiss you
From my court. Do you think that I am here
For solving riddles? Or do you expect
For the one true ring to speak up for itself?
But wait! You tell me that the true ring has 2015
The magic power to make beloved; to
Gain favour in the sight of God and humankind.
That must decide it! For the false rings cannot
Have this power. Which brother do two
Of you love most? Come on, speak up! You're silent? 2020
Do the rings work only inwards and
Not outwards? So that each one only loves
Himself the best? All three of you are then
Deceived deceivers; none of your
Three rings is genuine. The one true ring 2025
Has probably been lost. To hide the loss,
As substitute, your father had three rings
Made to replace the one.
- SALADIN Splendid! Splendid!
- NATHAN And so the judge went on, if you do not
Want my advice instead of judgement, go! 2030
But my advice is this: accept the case
Precisely as it stands. As each of you

Received his own ring from his father's hand,
 Let each believe for certain that *his* ring
 Is the original. Perhaps the father 2035
 Did not want to suffer any more
 The tyranny of one ring in his house.
 Certainly he loved all three of you,
 And loved you equally. He could not injure
 Two of you and favour only one. 2040
 Well then! Let each one strive to emulate
 His love, unbiased and unprejudiced.
 Let each one of you vie with the other two
 To bring to light the power of the stone
 In his own ring. And may this power be helped 2045
 By gentleness, sincere good nature,
 Charity and deepest of devotion to God.
 And when in time, the power of the stone
 Shall find expression in your children's children's
 Children, I invite you in a thousand, 2050
 Thousand years to come again before
 This court. A wiser man than I will then
 Sit in this chair and speak. Now go! – so said
 The modest judge.

SALADIN God! God!

NATHAN Saladin,
 If you should feel yourself to be this promised, 2055
 Wiser man ...

SALADIN (*who rushes to him and seizes his hand and does not let go again
 until the end*)

I who am no more than dust?
 Than nothing? God!

NATHAN What is it Saladin?

SALADIN Nathan, my dear Nathan! The thousand,
 Thousands years of your wise judge have not
 Yet passed. His judgement seat is not the one
 On which I sit. Go! – Go! – But be my friend. 2060

NATHAN And is there nothing more that Saladin
 Would say to me?

SALADIN Nothing.

NATHAN Nothing?

SALADIN Nothing

At all. Why do you ask?

NATHAN I'd like the chance
 To ask a favour of you.

SALADIN	Do you need A chance to ask a favour of me? Speak!	2065
NATHAN	I've come from a long journey during which I was collecting debts. And now I find I've almost too much ready money. Times Are once again becoming troubled, and, I do not know where I can put it safely. So I thought that you might possibly, – Because one needs more money when a war Is near – that you could use some of it.	2070
SALADIN	<i>(looking him straight in the eyes)</i> Nathan – I won't ask you if you've just had a visit From Al-Hafi. And I won't enquire If some suspicion leads you to propose This offer of your own accord.	2075
NATHAN	Suspicion?	
SALADIN	I deserve that. Please forgive me. What's The use? I must admit to you – that I Was just about to ...	
NATHAN	Surely not to ask This very thing?	2080
SALADIN	Indeed I was.	
NATHAN	So that Would help us both! – But I must tell you that I cannot send you <i>all</i> my ready cash Because of the Knight Templar. This young man Is known to you, I'm sure. My debt to him Is great, and I must pay it first.	2085
SALADIN	A Templar? Surely you don't think of giving money To support my deadliest enemies?	
NATHAN	I'm speaking only of this one, whose life You spared.	
SALADIN	Ah, what do you remind me of? For I had quite forgotten this young man ... You know him? Tell me, where is he?	2090
NATHAN	You mean You're unaware how much the mercy which You granted him has flowed through him to me? He risked his life, which you had newly spared, In rescuing my daughter from a fire.	2095

SALADIN Did he do that? He seemed that sort of man.
 My brother would have done the same, and this
 Man so resembles him. Is he still here?
 Do bring him! – I have often told my sister 2100
 Of this brother whom she never knew.
 And now I really cannot let her miss
 This chance to see his likeness, in the flesh.
 So go, and fetch him! – See how, out of one
 Good deed, which sprang from nothing more than passion, 2105
 Many more good deeds can flow. Go fetch him!

NATHAN (*releasing Saladin's hand*)
 Yes, this minute! And the other matter?
 We're agreed on that? (*Exit*)

SALADIN I should have let
 My sister listen – I must go to her!
 But how can I explain all this to her? 2110
 (*Exit on the other side*)

Scene 8

Templar alone

(*Scene: under the palm trees near to the monastery, where the Templar is waiting for Nathan*)

TEMPLAR (*walking up and down, wrestling with himself until he bursts out*)
 The sacrificial victim⁶⁰ stops exhausted –
 So be it! I don't want to understand
 What's going on within me; nor to sense
 What's going to happen. All I know is that
 I fled in vain. In vain! – But what else could 2115
 I do but flee? – Well, what will be, will be.
 I could not dodge the blow – it fell too quickly,
 Although I had refused so long and hard
 To fall beneath it. – To have seen this girl
 Whom I had wanted so much *not* to see – 2120
 To see her and resolve that I could never
 Take my eyes from her again. Resolve?
 Resolve means purpose, action. Whereas I,
 I merely suffered passively. To see her
 Was and is to feel entwined to her, 2125
 Bound up with her. – To live apart from her
 Is utterly unthinkable. It would
 Be death to me – wherever we may be

⁶⁰ Jewish and Islamic, not Christian, ritual.

When we are dead, it would be death there too.
 If this is love, then certainly a Templar 2130
 Is in love, and certainly a Christian
 Loves a Jewish girl. What of it? In
 The promised land⁶¹ – so full of promise now
 For me! – I've cast off many prejudices.
 What can my Order want of me? As Templar 2135
 I am dead, and have been from the moment
 That I became the Sultan's prisoner.
 And could this head, a gift from Saladin,
 Still be my old one? No, this head is new,
 Quite ignorant of all the old one heard 2140
 The bonds which held me. And this one is better,
 Far more suited to my father's native skies.
 That I can sense. For only with this head
 Do I begin to think the way my father
 Must have thought when he was here – unless 2145
 I've been deceived by fairy tales about him.
 Fairy tales? Perhaps. But credible,
 And never more so than they seem now, when
 I am at risk of stumbling where he fell.
 Fell? I would rather fall with men, than stand 2150
 With children. His example makes me sure
 Of his approval. Whose approval do
 I need apart from his? Nathan's? I need
 Encouragement from him more than approval.
 I cannot do without it. What a Jew! – 2155
 And yet content to seem a Jew and nothing
 Else. But here he comes in haste, his face
 Aglow with joy, like everyone who comes
 From Saladin. Hey Nathan!

Scene 9

Nathan and the Templar

NATHAN

Ah, it's you!

TEMPLAR You stayed a very long time with the Sultan. 2160

NATHAN Not really very long. I was delayed
 Before I went. I must say, Curd, the man
 Deserves his fame. His fame is just his shadow.

⁶¹ Exodus III 8. And I am come down to deliver them out of the land of the Egyptian and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.

But he wants me first of all to tell you
Quickly ...

TEMPLAR What?

NATHAN He wants to speak to you, 2165
And you're to go to him without delay.
But first come home with me, where I must
Deal with some other business for him,
And then we'll go!

TEMPLAR Nathan, I cannot set foot
In your house again until ...

NATHAN So you 2170
Have been there in the meantime? And
You've spoken to her? – Well then? Tell me, how
Does Recha please you?

TEMPLAR More than I can say!
And yet, to see her once again – No, never!
Never! Not until you promise, here 2175
And now, that I can see her always, and
For ever.

NATHAN How do you expect me to
Interpret that?

TEMPLAR (*after a short pause suddenly embraces him*)
My father!

NATHAN But young man!

TEMPLAR (*just as suddenly stepping back*)
Not son? I beg you, Nathan ...

NATHAN Dear young man!

TEMPLAR Not son? – but, Nathan, – I implore you, I 2180
Beseech you by the earliest bonds of nature! –
Do not be more swayed by later ties –
Just be content with being human. – Don't
Push me away.

NATHAN My dear, dear friend ...

TEMPLAR And son? 2185
Not son? Would you not even call me son
If in your daughter's heart her gratitude
Had already prepared the way to love?
Not even then, if both were just awaiting
Your signal to be melted into one?
You say nothing?

NATHAN	You surprise me, young knight.	2190
TEMPLAR	I surprise you? I surprise you, Nathan, With your own thoughts? – But you don't mistake them When I put them into words myself? I surprise you?	
NATHAN	I don't even know Your father's place in the Von Stauffen family.	2195
TEMPLAR	What are you saying, Nathan? Can it be That in this moment you feel nothing more Than curiosity?	
NATHAN	You see, I knew A man called Stauffen long ago myself. His name was Conrad.	
TEMPLAR	Well – and what if my Own father's name was also Conrad?	2200
NATHAN	Really?	
TEMPLAR	I was named after my father. Curd Is Conrad.	
NATHAN	But my Conrad cannot be Your father. For my Conrad was, like you, A Templar Knight, and he was never married.	2205
TEMPLAR	Even so.	
NATHAN	What!	
TEMPLAR	Even so he could Have been my father.	
NATHAN	This must be a joke!	
TEMPLAR	And you are taking it too seriously. So what? A bastard, illegitimate! That's nothing to despise. But kindly spare me Any more research into my ancestry. And in return I'll leave yours well alone. It's not as if I have the slightest doubt Of your ancestral tree. No, God forbid! You can authenticate it, leaf by leaf, Right back to Abraham. And further back I know it and could swear to it myself.	2210 2215
NATHAN	You're bitter. But do I deserve it? Have I yet refused you anything? It's just That I don't want to hold you to your word Immediately – no more than this.	2220

- DAJA You think so? No, sir knight; first you,
Then I shall follow. I assure you that
My secret won't be any use at all
To you if I don't have yours first. Come on! 2255
For if I find it out by asking you,
You'll not have told me anything. And then
My secret stays my secret, while you've let
Yours out. Poor knight! How can you men believe
That you can keep a secret of this nature 2260
From us women!
- TEMPLAR One that we don't know
We have ourselves.
- DAJA That may be so. In that case
I must prove my friendship to you and
Enlighten you about it. Tell me, sir,
What was the reason that you rushed away 2265
From us so suddenly? Why did you leave
Us sitting there? Why didn't you come back
With Nathan? Did our Recha make so little
Mark on you? Or was it all too much?
Too much! Too much! Now tell me all about 2270
The little bird, stuck on the lime twig, fluttering!
In short; confess to me, that you're in love,
That you're in love with her – madly in love.
And I'll tell you something ...
- TEMPLAR Madly? Yes,
You understand it very well.
- DAJA Then just 2275
Admit the love to me; and I'll forget
The madness.
- TEMPLAR But the madness is quite plain –
A Templar Knight should love a Jewish girl!
- DAJA There doesn't seem much sense in it, that's true. –
Yet sometimes there is more of sense in things 2280
Than we suppose; and after all it would
Not be so strange if Christ our Saviour drew
Us to himself on paths that prudent men,
Left to themselves, would hesitate to take.
- TEMPLAR So solemn? (And if I put 'Providence'
Instead of Christ, is she not right?) – You make
Me much more curious than I am used
To being. 2285

2320

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2330

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2340

2345

DAJA Just the truth,
Which has so often cost me tears of blood.
No, he is not her father ...

Act IV

Scene 1

The Lay Brother and the Templar

(Scene: In the cloisters of the monastery)

- LAY BROTHER Yes, yes, no doubt the Patriarch is right!
 And yet I really wasn't able to 2380
 Succeed in all that he commissioned me
 To undertake. Why does he only give
 Me things like this to do? I cannot be
 So subtle, cannot be persuasive, cannot
 Stick my nose in everywhere, or have 2385
 A hand in everything. And was this why
 For my own sake, I left the world behind,
 Only to find myself involved in worldly
 Matters for the sake of others?
- TEMPLAR *(coming quickly up to him)* Ah!
 Good brother! There you are. I have been looking 2390
 For you.
- LAY BROTHER Me, sir?
- TEMPLAR You don't recognise me?
- LAY BROTHER Yes of course, sir. But I thought that I
 Would never in my life encounter you
 Again. Indeed I hoped to God that I
 Would not. God knows how bitter to me was 2395
 The proposition which I was obliged
 To bring to you. He knows if I sincerely
 Wished to find in you a ready ear.
 He also knows how greatly I was pleased,
 Sincerely pleased, that you turned down outright 2400
 With little hesitation, everything
 That is improper for a knight.
 But now you've come, so it had some effect.
- TEMPLAR You know already why I've come? I scarcely
 Know myself.
- LAY BROTHER You've thought it over, and 2405
 Have now concluded that the Patriarch
 Was not so wrong at all; that wealth and honour
 Can be gained by his proposal; that
 An enemy is still an enemy
 Though he may be our saviour seven times. 2410
 You've weighed it up in human terms and come
 To offer your acceptance – ah, dear God!

- TEMPLAR My dear and pious man! Be reassured
I have not come for this. I do not want
To speak about it to the Patriarch. 2415
On this I still think as I thought before
And I don't want, at any price, to lose
The good opinion with which such an upright,
Such a pious man, has honoured me. 2419/20
I've simply come to ask the Patriarch's
Advice about a matter.
- LAY BROTHER You? To ask
The Patriarch? A knight has come to ask
A priest?
(*Looking round nervously*)
- TEMPLAR Yes, it's a rather priestly matter.
- LAY BROTHER Yet a priest would never ask a knight's 2425
Advice, however much it was a matter
For a knight.
- TEMPLAR But that's because the priest
Enjoys the privilege of doing wrong,
Which those like me do not much envy him.
Of course, if I were only acting for 2430
Myself, and if I were accountable 2430
To no-one but myself, what need would I have
Of your Patriarch? In certain things
I'd rather do what's wrong, according to
The will of others, than what's right according
To my own. Besides, I see now that 2435
Religion too is partisan; however
Impartial anyone may think himself,
Unconsciously he's bound to stand up for
His own cause. Since that's how things are, perhaps
That's how they should be.
- LAY BROTHER Sir, I couldn't say. 2440
I do not really understand you.
- TEMPLAR Yet – 2440
(Let me consider what I really want:
To be commanded or advised? Advised
By honesty or learning?) Thank you, brother
Thank you for your hint. – Why ask the Patriarch?
You be my Patriarch! Indeed I want 2445
To ask the Christian in the Patriarch
More than the Patriarch in the Christian.
My question is ...

Scene 2

⁶² As a Lay Brother he had made a vow only of obedience.

TEMPLAR	With the very thing In which my youth is lacking: with advice.	
PATRIARCH	Most gladly. But advice must be accepted.	2475
TEMPLAR	Yet not blindly?	
PATRIARCH	Who says that? Of course No one must neglect to use the reason Given him by God – wherever it Is fitting – but is reason always fitting? Not at all! For instance, when God, acting Through one of his angels – that's to say, Through any servant of his word – is pleased To show to us a means by which we may Advance the welfare of all Christendom, And help the church's cause in some specific Way, and strengthen it – who then should dare To use his reason to examine the Authority of him who first created Reason? And to scrutinise the eternal Law of Heaven's majesty, according To the petty rules of futile honour? But enough of this. What is the question, Sir, about which you are seeking our Advice?	2480 2485 2490
TEMPLAR	Suppose, most venerable father, That there were a Jew who had a child, An only child, let's say a girl, and brought her up With utmost care and goodness; whom he loved More than his soul, and who in turn loved him With most devoted love. And then it was Revealed to one of us that this young girl Was not the daughter of the Jew. He may Have come across her as a child, he may Have bought her, stolen her, or what you will. And it is known that she's a Christian child Who was baptised; the Jew has only brought her up To be a Jew, and has allowed her to Remain a Jew as his own daughter; tell Me, venerable father, in this case, What should be done?	2495 2500 2505
PATRIARCH	I am appalled. But first Of all, sir, tell me whether such a case Is actual fact or mere hypothesis? That is to say – is this your own invention, Nothing more, or did it really happen And is still continuing?	2510

TEMPLAR	I should	
	Have thought that, to obtain your Reverence's	2515
	View, it would all be the same.	
PATRIARCH	The same?	
	You see, Sir, how the pride of human reason	
	Can err in spiritual things. – Quite wrong!	
	For if the case which you have just described	
	Is just an intellectual game, it does	2520
	Not merit serious consideration.	
	I would refer you to the theatre ⁶³ with	
	It, sir, where pros and cons of such a kind	
	Might be debated and could win there great	
	Applause. But if you have not simply mocked	2525
	Me, sir, with a dramatic jest, and if	
	The case is really factual, if it	
	Is even possible it has occurred	
	Within our diocese, our own dear city	
	Of Jerusalem – well then –	
TEMPLAR	What then?	2530
PATRIARCH	Why, then the Jew would swiftly undergo	
	The penalty laid down by papal and	
	Imperial law for such a sacrilege,	
	For such a wicked crime.	
TEMPLAR	Indeed?	
PATRIARCH	It is	
	A fact that the aforesaid laws lay down	2535
	That any Jew who leads astray a Christian	
	To apostasy ⁶⁴ – shall burn to death –	
	Burn at the stake –	
TEMPLAR	Indeed?	
PATRIARCH	And how much more	
	A Jew who snatched a helpless Christian child	
	By force from its baptismal ties. For is	2540
	Not everything that's done to children, force –	
	Excepting what the Church itself may do	
	To children.	
TEMPLAR	But suppose the child might well	
	Have died in misery, if she had not	
	Been rescued by the Jew.	

⁶³ A deliberate anachronism on Lessing's part.

⁶⁴ Apostasy – renunciation of the Christian faith.

PATRIARCH	It makes no difference.	2545
	The Jew shall burn. For it is better that The child should die in misery than that It should be damned eternally by being Saved in such a way. Besides, how can The Jew anticipate the will of God?	2550
	Our God saves whom he will, without his help.	
TEMPLAR	But surely God can save, in spite of him.	
PATRIARCH	No difference! The Jew shall burn.	
TEMPLAR	But that Concerns me, and especially as it Is said he brought the girl up not in his Own faith, but rather in no faith at all, And taught her neither more nor less of God Than reason finds sufficient.	2555
PATRIARCH	All this makes No difference! The Jew shall burn. For this alone he should be burnt thrice over. What? Let a child grow up without a faith Of any kind? What? Not to give a child The slightest teaching of its greatest duty, Namely to believe? How wicked! I'm Astonished, sir, that you yourself ...	2560
TEMPLAR	The rest, Your Reverence, God willing, in confession. (<i>he is about to go</i>)	2565
PATRIARCH	What? You will not tell me now? Not name The Jew, the villain? Not surrender him To me? In that case, I know what to do! I'll go at once to Saladin. The Sultan Must, according to the treaty sworn By him, he must protect us; must protect Us in all laws and in all doctrines which We have the right to claim as ours, as part And parcel of our holiest religion!	2570
	Praise be to God; we have the document, We have his hand and seal. Yes, that we have! And I can make him understand quite easily The danger to the state itself	2575
	Of not believing anything. All civil Ties are loosened, torn apart if people Are allowed to have no faith at all. Away, away with such an outrage!	2580

Scene 3

(Scene: a room in Saladin's palace into which a large number of bags are being carried by slaves and being piled up on the floor.) Saladin is joined by Sitah

SALADIN *(coming in)*
Well really, there's no end to this. Is there
Much more to come?

SLAVE About as much again.

SALADIN Then take the rest to Sittah. – And where has
Al-Hafi gone? Al-Hafi should be taking
All this money straight away – or had 2605
I better send it to my father? Here
It will just slip straight through my fingers. Yet
One does get hardened in the end; now it
Will take some skill to get much out of me.
At least till all the gold from Egypt has 2610
Arrived, the poor will have to cope as best
They can. As long as alms can still be given

SALADIN	(<i>to a servant who comes in</i>)	Who	2645
	Is there? – the Templar? – Show him in!		
SITTAH		I won't	
	Disturb you – and I won't confuse him with My curiosity. (<i>Sittah sits to one side on a sofa and lowers her veil</i>)		
SALADIN	That's good! – (And now His voice! I wonder what it's like. Within My soul, somewhere the voice of Assad sleeps.)		2650

Scene 4

The Templar and Saladin

TEMPLAR	Your prisoner, Sultan ...		
SALADIN	My prisoner?		
	If I grant life to someone shall I not Grant freedom to him also?		
TEMPLAR	It is fitting I should hear what you think fitting, not Anticipate your actions. And yet, Sultan, To express my special thanks to you For sparing me is not in keeping with my rank Or with my character. In any case My life is once more at your service.		2655
SALADIN	Do Not use your life against me! I would gladly Grant my enemy another pair Of hands. To grant him such a heart would be More difficult. I've not in any way Misjudged you – you're a fine young man. And you're The very image of my Assad. I Might even ask you: where have you been hiding All this time? And in what cave have you Been sleeping? ⁶⁵ What good spirit, in what fairy Land, has kept this flower so fresh for all This time? Indeed, I could remind you of The things we used to do together, you And I. And yet, I could be angry with You, too, for keeping one thing secret from me,		2660 2665 2670

⁶⁵ The legend of the Seven Sleepers tells of seven young people, who would not worship the emperor as god, who were hidden by a shepherd in a cave, which was then sealed up by the emperor. After 186 years they woke up, not having aged.

For there's one adventure which you never
 Shared with me. Indeed I could; if I 2675
 Saw only you, and not myself as well.
 So be it! There remains such truth in this
 Sweet reverie that in the autumn of
 My days an Assad is alive again.
 Are you content with this, knight?

TEMPLAR Everything 2680
 That comes to me from you – whatever it
 May be – my soul desires already.

SALADIN Let
 Us test that out. Would you remain with me,
 Stay near me? – As a Christian, Muslim – either
 In your white cloak or in an Arab robe 2685
 With turban or with your felt cap. Just as
 You like. It's all the same. I've never wanted
 The same bark to grow on every tree.

TEMPLAR Or you would hardly be the man you are:
 A hero who would rather be God's gardener. 2690

SALADIN Well, if you think no worse of me, we are
 Already half agreed?

TEMPLAR Completely!

SALADIN (*offering his hand*) Here's
 My hand.

TEMPLAR (*taking his hand*)
 And mine – with this, accept far more
 Than you could take from me. Now I am yours.

SALADIN These gains are too much for a single day! 2695
 He did not come with you?

TEMPLAR Who?

SALADIN Nathan.

TEMPLAR (*coldly*)
 No.
 I came alone.

SALADIN How fine a deed of yours!
 And what wise fortune that a deed like that
 Should turn out for the good of such a man.

TEMPLAR Oh, yes.

SALADIN So cold? – Oh no, young man! When God 2700
 Does something good through us, one must not be
 So cold! – One must not even wish to seem
 So cold from modesty.

2705

2710

2715

2720

2725

2730

2735

- I jumped into the fire a second time – 2740
 For now *I* wooed and now *I* was disdained.
- SALADIN Disdained?
- TEMPLAR Well, the wise father did not flatly
 Turn me down. The wise father would need
 To make enquiries first, he needed to 2745
 Reflect. Of course! Did I not do that too?
 Did I not make enquiries, and reflect
 While she was screaming in the fire? Indeed!
 My God! My God! How fine a thing it is
 To be so wise, and circumspect.
- SALADIN Come now!
 You might make some allowance for his age. 2750
 How long do you suppose he can refuse?
 Do you expect him to demand that you
 Should first become a Jew yourself?
- TEMPLAR Who knows!
- SALADIN Who knows? – A man who knows this Nathan better.
- TEMPLAR The superstition in which we grew up 2755
 Does not relax its power over us,
 Not even when we see it as it is.
 And so, not all who mock their chains are free.
- SALADIN Yes, how mature! But Nathan, really, Nathan ...
- TEMPLAR And the worst of superstitions is 2760
 To think one's own most tolerable.
- SALADIN That
 May be. But Nathan ...
- TEMPLAR To let dull
 Humanity believe in that alone
 Till it can take the brighter light of truth;
 In that alone ...
- SALADIN Agreed. But Nathan, – Nathan 2765
 Does not have this weakness.
- TEMPLAR So I thought.
 If none the less this paragon of men
 Were such a common Jew that he had sought out
 Christian children so that he could bring
 Them up as Jews; – what would you think of that? 2770
 But who says that of him?
- SALADIN The girl herself
 With whom he lured me on, as if he wished
 To pay me with the promise of her for
 An act which he assumed I didn't do

For nothing. The girl is not his daughter – no: 2775
She is a foundling Christian child.

SALADIN But even
So, he did not want to give her to you?

TEMPLAR (*stormily*)
Whether he did or not! He is unmasked.
This tolerant old windbag is unmasked.
I'll call for dogs to be unleashed upon 2780
This Jewish wolf in philosophical⁶⁶
Sheep's clothing, and they'll tear him limb from limb!

SALADIN (*sternly*)
Be quiet, Christian!

TEMPLAR What? Be quiet, Christian?
When Jews and Muslims all insist on being
Jews and Muslims, only Christians may
Not act the Christian?

SALADIN (*more sternly*) Quiet, Christian!

TEMPLAR (*calmly*) Now
I feel the weight of the reproach compressed
In these two words by Saladin. Ah, if
I knew how Assad – how your Assad would
Have acted in my place!

SALADIN Oh, not much better! 2790

Probably as violently. But who
Already taught you, just like him, to pierce
Me with a single word? Of course, if everything
Turns out as you have said, then I myself
Can not make Nathan out at all. But in 2795
The meantime he is still my friend, and none
Among my friends must quarrel with another.
Take my advice; proceed with care. Don't give
Him straight to the fanatics in your mob.
Just imagine what your clergy would 2800
Demand from me as a revenge on him.
Do not be a Christian just to spite
A Jew or Muslim.

TEMPLAR It might soon have been
Too late, but for the Patriarch's blood lust,
Which made me shudder to become his tool.

⁶⁶ Matthew 7:15. 'Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.'

SALADIN		What?	2805
	You went to see the Patriarch, before You came to me?		
TEMPLAR	Yes in a storm of passion, In a whirl of indecision. Please Forgive me! From now on I fear you will Not want to recognize Assad in me.		2810
SALADIN	Unless I recognize this fear itself! I know the faults from which our virtue springs. Just practice virtue, and the faults will do you Little harm with me. But you must go. Now seek out Nathan, as he sought you out; And bring him here. I have to make you understand Each other. If you're serious About the girl, don't worry – she is yours. And Nathan also must be made to pay For having dared to rear a Christian child Without the taste of pork. ⁶⁷ Now go! (<i>The Templar goes out and Sittah leaves the sofa</i>)		2815 2820

Scene 5

Saladin and Sittah

SITTAH		How strange!	
SALADIN	Admit it, Sittah; don't you think my Assad Must have been a handsome, fine young man?		
SITTAH	If he was really like that, and the Templar Did not sit as model for this portrait! But Saladin, how could you have forgotten To enquire about his parents?		2825
SALADIN	In Particular about his mother, whether She had ever visited this country – Is that what you mean?		
SITTAH		You could have asked.	2830
SALADIN	It's certainly quite possible. For Assad Was so welcome among pretty Christian Ladies, was entranced by Christian ladies, That there even was a rumour – well, One doesn't like to talk about it. It's Enough I have him back – and want him back With all his faults, with all the changing moods		2835

⁶⁷ Eating pork is forbidden both by Jewish and Islamic religions.

Of his warm heart. Oh, surely Nathan must
Give him the girl. Don't you agree?

SITTAH Give her?
Give her up!

SALADIN Indeed. What kind of right 2840
Could Nathan have to her, if he is not
Her father? Only one who saved her life
Has rights to her, inherited from one
Who *gave* her life.

SITTAH Well Saladin? Suppose
You have the girl brought here to you? Remove 2845
Her straight away from her unlawful owner.

SALADIN Is that really necessary?

SITTAH Not
Exactly necessary. Curiosity
Alone makes me suggest it to you.
With certain men I want to know as soon 2850
As possible the kind of girl with whom
They are inclined to fall in love.

SALADIN Then, send
For her, and have her brought here.

SITTAH May I, brother?

SALADIN But spare Nathan's feelings. He must not
Believe that we intend to tear the girl 2855
From him by force.

SITTAH Don't worry.

SALADIN And meanwhile
I must find out what's happened to Al-Hafi.

Scene 6

Nathan and Daja

(Scene: the hall in Nathan's house, opening on to the palms; as in the first scene. Part of the goods and treasures are lying around unpacked as they are being sorted out)

DAJA Oh, this is all so splendid! Exquisite!
Oh, everything – as only you can give.
Where do they make this silver cloth with interwoven 2860
Gold? What does it cost? That's what
I call a bridal dress! No queen could ask
For better.

NATHAN Bridal dress? Why bridal dress?

DAJA	Of course you did not think of that when you Were buying it. But truly, Nathan, it Must be this one and nothing else. It is As if intended for a bride. The white Background, symbol of innocence; the golden Threads which twist and turn all over it, Symbol of riches. Look at it: it's lovely!	2865 2870
NATHAN	What are you telling me? Whose bridal dress Are you interpreting so learnedly? Are you the bride?	
DAJA	I?	
NATHAN	Who then?	
DAJA	I? Dear God!	
NATHAN	But who? Whose bridal dress are you describing? This is all for you and no one else.	2875
DAJA	All this is mine? For me? And not for Recha?	
NATHAN	What I bought for Recha is still packed Inside another bale. Go on! Away! Take all your bits and pieces!	
DAJA	Oh you tempter! No. If this were all the treasure of The whole wide world. I wouldn't touch it, Not Unless you swear to me that you will use This unique opportunity, which heaven Will not offer you a second time.	2880
NATHAN	Use what? – An opportunity for what?	2885
DAJA	Oh, don't pretend that you don't know – in short, The Templar Knight loves Recha; give her to him, By doing so, at once you end your sin Which I cannot keep secret any longer. The girl will be with Christians once again, Will once again be what she is; and once Again be what she was. And you, whom we Can never thank enough for all your goodness, At last you will escape the coals of fire ⁶⁸ Upon your head.	2890
NATHAN	Again the same old song? But you have fixed a new string to your lyre, Which will not hold or stay in tune, I fear.	2895

⁶⁸ Romans 12:20. 'Therefore if thine enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.'

DAJA	Why not?	
NATHAN	The Templar is a good man, and To no one in the world would I prefer To give my Recha, but – have patience.	
DAJA	Patience?	2900
	Isn't patience just the same old song From you?	
NATHAN	Just patience for a few more days! But look – who's that approaching? It's a lay brother Go, and ask him what he wants.	
DAJA	What can he want?	
	<i>(She goes and asks him)</i>	
NATHAN	Before he asks, just give him alms – (If I could only sound the Templar Knight out first And not tell him the reason why I ask. For if I tell him and there are no grounds For my suspicion, I have put the father Needlessly at risk.) What does he want?	2905 2910
DAJA	He wants to speak to you.	
NATHAN	Well, let him come: And meanwhile you can go.	

Scene 7

Nathan and the Lay Brother

NATHAN	(If only I Could still be Recha's father! – Can't I be, Even when I cease to bear the name? She herself will always call me father If she sees how much it means to me.) What service can I do you, holy brother?	2915
LAY BROTHER	Very little. – Nathan, sir, I'm pleased To see you are still well.	
NATHAN	You know me then?	
LAY BROTHER	Indeed; who doesn't know you? You have pressed Your name into the hands of many people. It has remained in mine for many years.	2920
NATHAN	<i>(reaching for his purse)</i> Come, brother, come; I will refresh it.	
LAY BROTHER	Thank you, I'd be stealing from a poorer man, So I'll take nothing. But allow me to Refresh your memory about my name.	2925

- For I can pride myself on having put
Into your hands something of no mean worth.
- NATHAN Forgive me. – I am ashamed – what was it, tell
Me? And accept as penance sevenfold 2930
The value of this thing from me.
- LAY BROTHER But first
Of all, just listen how, this very day,
I was reminded of this pledge I had
Entrusted to you.
- NATHAN You entrusted me?
- LAY BROTHER Not long ago I lived a hermit's life 2935
On Quarantana⁶⁹ near to Jericho.
There came an Arab band of robbers, who
Destroyed my little temple and my cell
And carried me off with them. Luckily
I fled, and came here to the Patriarch 2940
To beg another small place for myself
Where I could serve my God in solitude
Until my days should reach a peaceful end.
- NATHAN I burn to know the rest. Good brother, make
It brief. The pledge! The pledge entrusted me! 2945
- LAY BROTHER At once, sir. – I was promised by the Patriarch
A hermit's cell on Tabor,⁷⁰ just as soon
As one was free; meanwhile I was to stay
As a lay brother in the monastery.
I am there now, Nathan sir; and yearn 2950
A hundred times a day for Tabor. For
The Patriarch makes use of me for many
Things which are repugnant to me, for
Example:
- NATHAN Please go on.
- LAY BROTHER I'm coming to it –
Somebody today has whispered to 2955
Him that a Jew is living somewhere here
Who has brought up a Christian child as his
Own daughter.

⁶⁹ Quarantana, a mountain between Jericho and Jerusalem whose name refers to the 40 days and 40 nights of Christ's temptation in the wilderness.

⁷⁰ Tabor, a mountain in Galilee, associated with the transfiguration of Christ.

- NATHAN *(Taken aback)* What?
- LAY BROTHER Just, just let me finish. Then
 He orders me to run this Jew to earth
 Without delay, if possible, and he 2960
 Condemns most vehemently such a crime
 Which is, it seems to him, the very sin
 Against the Holy Ghost⁷¹ – that is the sin
 Which, of all sins, is counted by us as
 The greatest; but thank God we don't exactly 2965
 Know what such a sin consists of. Then
 My conscience suddenly awakes and it
 Occurs to me that, long ago, perhaps
 I gave the opportunity for this
 Great, unpardonable sin. So tell 2970
 Me: eighteen years ago did not a groom
 Bring you a little girl a few weeks old?
- NATHAN What? – Yes, that's true – I do admit –
- LAY BROTHER Well then,
 Just look at me. I am that groom.
- NATHAN You are?
- LAY BROTHER The gentleman from whom I brought her was – 2975
 If I remember right – a Herr von Filnek –
 Wolf von Filnek.
- NATHAN Right!
- LAY BROTHER The mother had
 Just died, and suddenly the father had
 To hurry off – I think to Gaza,⁷² where
 The little thing could not go with him. So 2980
 He had her sent to you. Did I not meet
 You with her in Darun?⁷³
- NATHAN Quite right.
- LAY BROTHER It would
 Be little wonder, if my memory
 Deceived me. I've had many worthy masters,
 And I served this one all too short a time. 2985

⁷¹ Matthew 12:31. 'The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.'

⁷² Gaza was recaptured from the Crusaders by Saladin.

⁷³ Darun – on the Palestinian border near to Egypt.

Soon after that he died at Askalon;⁷⁴
He was a kindly gentleman.

NATHAN

Indeed.

I have so very much to thank him for,
Since more than once he saved me from the sword.

LAY BROTHER

That's very good. So you'd have taken in
His little daughter very willingly.

2990

NATHAN

You can be sure I did.

LAY BROTHER

Then, where is she?

I hope it cannot be that she has died?
Oh let her not have died. For if there's no-one
Else who knows about it, – then some good
May come of it.

2995

NATHAN

It may?

LAY BROTHER

Trust me, Nathan!

Listen, this is what I think. If I
Intend to do a good deed, but a deed
Which borders closely on the bad, then I
Would rather leave the good undone. Because
We can be sure of knowing what is bad,
But we are far less sure of what is good.
It was of course quite natural that if
The little Christian girl was to be well
Brought up by you, you raised her as your daughter
And you would have done it with all love
And true devotion. So is this how you
Should be rewarded? I cannot believe so.
Of course it might have been more prudent if
You had arranged to have the Christian child
Brought up by someone else, as Christian; but
You would in that case have denied your love
To your friend's child. And children at that age
Need love, if only that of a wild beast,
More than they need Christianity.
Christianity can wait till later.
So long as, in your eyes, the girl has grown
To be devout and healthy, in the eyes
Of God she has remained just as she was.
And was not all of Christianity
Founded on Judaism? It has often
Caused me pain, and cost me many tears,

2999/0

3005

3010

3015

3020

⁷⁴ Askalon – a coastal town taken by Saladin in 1187.

That Christians could so utterly forget
That our dear saviour was a Jew. 3025

NATHAN Good brother, you must be my advocate
If hatred and hypocrisy are roused
Against me – all because of such a deed –
Ah, such a deed! Now you alone shall know 3030
About it. Take it with you to the grave!
Vanity has never tempted me
To speak of it to anyone. To you
Alone, I'll speak, to you and to your simple
Piety. For only such a one
Can understand what deeds can be achieved 3035
By human beings who submit to God.

LAY BROTHER You're deeply moved; your eyes are full of tears.

NATHAN In Darun you met me with the child.
But you don't know that, only days before,
In Gath,⁷⁵ the Christians murdered all the Jews, 3040
Their wives and children; and you do not know
That in this number were my wife and, with
Her, seven sons, all full of promise. In
My brother's house, where I had sent them to
Be safe, they burned to death.

LAY BROTHER Almighty God! 3045

NATHAN When you arrived, three days and nights, in dust
And ashes, I had lain before my God
And wept. But more than wept, I argued bitterly
With God, I stormed, I raged, I cursed myself
And all the world, and swore undying hate 3050
Of Christendom at large.

LAY BROTHER That I believe.

NATHAN And yet my reason gradually returned.
It spoke with gentle voice: 'Yet God exists.
And even this was God's decree. And so,
Arise and act the way you long have understood; 3055
It surely is not harder now to act
Than it has been to understand, if you
But have the will. Stand up!' – And so I stood,
And cried to God, 'I will! If only you
Can will me to it.' At that moment, you 3060
Dismounted from your horse, and handed me
The child wrapped in your cloak. What passed between

⁷⁵ Gath – on the Mediterranean coast.

Us I forget. But this I know: I took
 The child, I put it on my couch, and kissed it
 Fell upon my knees and sobbed: 'Oh God!
 For seven, one is now restored!' 3065

LAY BROTHER Oh Nathan!
 You're a Christian! Yes, by God, a Christian!
 A better Christian there has never been!

NATHAN It works both ways. For what makes me a Christian
 In your eyes, makes you a Jew in mine. 3070
 But enough of all our feelings. We
 Need action! And although my love already
 Binds me seven fold to this one foreign
 Girl, although the thought already kills me
 That I must lose my seven sons again 3075
 In her – if providence demands that I
 Surrender her again, – I shall obey.

LAY BROTHER Now that's exactly the advice I had
 In mind to offer you. But now your own
 Good spirit has already said the same. 3080

NATHAN But I can't let anyone who comes
 Along tear her from me.

LAY BROTHER Of course not.

NATHAN One
 Who has no greater rights to her than I
 Must at the least have earlier rights –

LAY BROTHER Of course.

NATHAN Rights granted him by nature and the ties
 Of family. 3085

LAY BROTHER Yes, I agree.

NATHAN So quickly
 Name the man related to her – brother,
 Uncle, cousin, other relative;
 I won't refuse her to him – for she was
 Created and brought up to be the pride 3090
 Of any house, of any faith. I hope
 That you know more than I about this man
 Who was your master, and his family.

LAY BROTHER Good Nathan, I'm afraid I hardly do!
 I have already told you that I served
 Him only very briefly. 3095

NATHAN Do you not
 At least have any knowledge of the mother's
 Family? – Was she perhaps a Stauffen?

DAJA	The Sultan's	
	Sister, Princess Sittah ...	
NATHAN	Not the Patriarch?	
DAJA	No, Sittah! – Don't you hear me? – Princess Sittah Sent for her. She wants to see her.	
NATHAN	Who?	3130
	She sent for Recha? – Sittah sent for her? Well then, If Sittah sends for her, and not The Patriarch ...	
DAJA	Why mention him?	
NATHAN	So you've Heard nothing from him recently? You're sure? You've told him nothing?	
DAJA	I? Tell him?	
NATHAN	Where are	3135
	The messengers?	
DAJA	Outside.	
NATHAN	For safety's sake I'll speak to them myself. Just come! – I hope The Patriarch is not behind all this. <i>(Exit)</i>	
DAJA	And I – I have a different fear. What's going On? A girl who is supposed to be	3140
	The only daughter of a wealthy Jew Would be no bad match for a Muslim? – Oh, The Templar's chance is lost. He's lost, unless I venture now upon the second step, And tell the girl herself just who she is.	3145
	I must! As soon as I can talk to her Alone, I'll grasp the opportunity. And that will be – perhaps right now, when I Go with her. On our way at least I'll drop A hint to start with. That can do no harm.	3150
	Yes, yes, it's now or never! I must speak. <i>(Exit)</i>	

⁷⁶ Mameluke – member of the Sultan's bodyguard.

What has come over me so near my death
That suddenly I want to change my nature?
Does Saladin refuse to die as Saladin?
Then he should not have lived as Saladin.

MAMELUKE 2 Greetings, Sultan.

SALADIN If you've come to tell me ... 3180

MAMELUKE 2 That the caravan from Egypt has arrived.

SALADIN I know already.

MAMELUKE 2 Then I came too late.

SALADIN And why too late? – Here for your good intentions
You can take a sack or two.

MAMELUKE 2 Ah, one
Or two makes three!

SALADIN So you can count? Just take
them. 3185

MAMELUKE 2 There may be a third man coming – that is
If he's able.

SALADIN Meaning what?

MAMELUKE 2 Well now;
It's possible he has a broken neck; because
As soon as we, the three of us, were sure
The convoy had arrived, we galloped off. 3190
The one who was in front fell off his horse.
Then I was in the lead, and stayed there till
We came into the town, where Ibrahim,
The rogue, has better knowledge of the streets.

SALADIN But what about the one who fell, my friend? 3195
Ride out and meet him.

MAMELUKE 2 Yes I will. And if
He's still alive, I'll give him half the money.
(Exit)

SALADIN He's a good and noble fellow too.
Who else can boast of Mamelukes like these?
And may I not believe that they are what 3200
They are, at least in part, from my example?
I must reject the thought of changing that
Example as I end my days.

MAMELUKE 3 Sultan!

SALADIN You're
The one who fell?

Scene 2

SALADIN	Be sure to take	3220
	Sufficient escort. It's no longer safe	
	In Lebanon. Have you not heard? The Templars	
	Are in action once again. Be on	
	Your guard. Now, where's the camel train? I want	
	To see it and take care of everything	3225
	Myself. You there! I'll be with Sittah later.	

Scene 3

TEMPLAR I won't set foot inside the house again –
 He must appear eventually. They welcomed
 Me so eagerly before, and now
 I'm likely to be told that he no longer

3230

⁷⁷ In upper Egypt.

Tolerates my presence all the time
 Outside his house. And yet I also feel
 Provoked to anger. What has so embittered
 Me against him? – After all he said,
 He didn't yet refuse me anything. 3235
 The Sultan promised to persuade him – what
 Then? Is it that the Christian in me is
 More deeply rooted than the Jew in him?
 Who really knows himself? Why else should I
 Be so reluctant to allow the little 3240
 Theft which he committed for his purposes
 Against the Christians. But this is no little
 Theft of such a creature! Creature? Who
 Is her creator? Not the slave, who floated
 The unhewn block on to the barren shore 3245
 Of life, and then ran off. No, it must surely
 Be the artist who, in the abandoned block,
 Conceived a godly form and fashioned it.
 Truly, Recha's real father must
 Remain, despite the Christian who begot 3250
 Her, must remain the Jew forever. If
 I think of her as just a Christian girl,
 And think of her devoid of everything
 Which only such a Jew could give to her,
 Then, my heart, what would you see in her? – 3255
 Almost nothing! For her smile itself
 Would be a sweet and gentle movement of
 The muscles, nothing more. And if what made
 Her smile was never worthy of its charm upon
 Her mouth, I would not even like her smile. 3260
 I have seen sweeter, wasted on mere whims
 And useless trifles, scorn and flattery,
 Flirtation – and did those enchant me too?
 Did they too conjure up the wish in me
 To flutter all my life away in their 3265
 Sunshine? Oh no. And yet I'm angry with
 The man who, single-handed, made her what
 She is. But why? Perhaps I merited
 The scorn with which I was dismissed by Saladin.
 It's bad enough that Saladin should think so. 3270
 How small I must have seemed to him! And how
 Contemptible! And all this for a girl? –
 Curd! Curd! This cannot be. Control yourself!
 Suppose that Daja was just chattering
 About a thing that would be difficult 3275
 To prove? At last! He's coming from his house.

He's deep in conversation. But with whom?
 With him, with my Lay Brother? Ah! so now
 He must know everything! Perhaps he is
 Betrayed already to the Patriarch. 3280
 Oh what a fool I've been to cause all this,
 To think that just a single spark of passion
 Can set all our brain on fire! Now quickly
 Make your mind up: What are you to do?
 I'll wait here for them, to one side – perhaps 3285
 The Brother will be leaving before long.

Scene 4

Nathan and the Lay Brother

NATHAN *(as they approach)*
 Once again, good brother, many thanks.

LAY BROTHER My thanks to you as well!

NATHAN Your thanks for what?
 Because I obstinately pressed on you
 Something you don't need? If only you 3290
 Had given in. But you refused to be
 A richer man than I am.

LAY BROTHER Anyway,
 The book does not belong to me. It is
 The daughter's property. In fact
 The one and only legacy she has 3295
 From her own father – though she does have you.
 God grant you never may have reason
 To regret all you have done for her.

NATHAN How could I?
 Never! Have no fear of that.

LAY BROTHER And yet,
 With all these Patriarchs and Templar Knights ... 3300

NATHAN No harm that they could ever do to me
 Would make me feel regret for anything
 I've done, and certainly not this.
 And are you sure it really is a Templar
 Who's stirring up your Patriarch?

LAY BROTHER It couldn't 3305
 Have been anybody else. A Templar
 Had just been talking to him; what I heard
 Confirmed it.

NATHAN But at present there is only
 One of them in all Jerusalem.

I know him, and he is a friend of mine, 3310
A noble and sincere young man!

LAY BROTHER That's right,
The very one! Yet what one is and what
One must be in this world – the two things don't always
Fit exactly.

NATHAN Sadly not; and so
Whoever it may be, just let him do 3315
His worst or best! Now, Brother, with your book
I shall defy them all, and take it straight
To Saladin.

LAY BROTHER Good luck! I'll leave you now.

NATHAN You haven't even seen her? Come back soon,
And come as often as you can. I hope 3320
The Patriarch learns nothing more today.
But why not? Tell him if you like.

LAY BROTHER I shan't.
Farewell! (*Exit*)

NATHAN But don't forget us, Brother – God!
If only I could sink upon my knees
Right here, under the vault of heaven. How 3325
The tangled web, which caused me such anxiety,
Unravels of its own accord! – Oh God,
How light I feel now that there's nothing that
I need to hide, and now that I can walk
Before humanity as freely as 3330
Before your sight. You are the only one
Who does not judge us human beings by
Our deeds, which rarely are our deeds, Oh God.

Scene 5

Nathan and the Templar

The Templar comes up to Nathan from the side

TEMPLAR Hey, Nathan, wait! Take me with you.

NATHAN Who's that?
Oh, there you are! Where did you go? I was 3335
Expecting you to meet me at the Sultan's.

TEMPLAR We missed each other. Don't be angry.

NATHAN I am
Not. But Saladin ...

TEMPLAR You had just left.

NATHAN	You spoke to him? That's good.	
TEMPLAR	He wants to speak To both of us together.	
NATHAN	Better still. Come with me. I am on my way to him.	3340
TEMPLAR	May I ask you, Nathan, who it was Who left you just now?	
NATHAN	Don't you know him then?	
TEMPLAR	Wasn't it that good soul, the Lay Brother Whom the Patriarch is fond of using To sniff things out?	3345
NATHAN	Perhaps. He's in the service Of the Patriarch.	
TEMPLAR	A clever trick, To let a simple man prepare the way For villainy.	
NATHAN	Yes, if he's stupid – not If he is pious.	
TEMPLAR	But no Patriarch Believes in piety.	3350
NATHAN	I'll vouch for this man. He won't help his Patriarch do anything Improper.	
TEMPLAR	So he claims. But didn't he Say anything to you concerning me?	
NATHAN	Concerning you? He did not mention you By name. He'd hardly know your name.	3355
TEMPLAR	No, hardly.	
NATHAN	As it happens, he did speak about A Templar ...	
TEMPLAR	And said what?	
NATHAN	He cannot Possibly have meant you in this case.	3360
TEMPLAR	Who knows? What did he say?	
NATHAN	That someone had Denounced me to the Patriarch.	
TEMPLAR	Denounced You? That is – with all due respect to him –	

TEMPLAR

NATHAN

TEMPLAR

NATHAN

TEMPLAR

For her. Give her to me! I beg

You, Nathan, just give her to me! I am
The only one who, for the second time,
Can save her for you – and I will. 3445

NATHAN I could
Have done so, but not now. It is too late
For that.

TEMPLAR Too late?

NATHAN Thanks to the Patriarch.

TEMPLAR The Patriarch? Thanks? Thanks to him? For what? 3450
He is the one who ought to give us thanks.
So why thank him?

NATHAN Because we know to whom
She is related, and we know into
Whose hands she now can safely be entrusted.

TEMPLAR Thank him? Let the devil thank him! 3455

NATHAN And now you must receive her from those hands,
And not from mine.

TEMPLAR Poor Recha! How you are
Pursued by fate, poor Recha! What for any
Other orphan would be great good fortune
Is disaster for you. Nathan, where 3460
Are these relations?

NATHAN Where?

TEMPLAR And who are they?

NATHAN They've found a brother in particular,
And you must ask him for her hand.

TEMPLAR A brother?
What is he, this brother? He's a soldier?
Or a priest? – Just tell me what I can
Expect

NATHAN I think that he is neither, or 3465
Perhaps he may be both. I don't know much
About him yet.

TEMPLAR What else?

NATHAN A fine young man.
With whom our Recha may perhaps do well.

TEMPLAR And yet he is a Christian. Sometimes, Nathan, 3470
I just don't know what to think of you.
I don't mean to offend you, but when she's with

Christians, won't she have to play the Christian?
 If she plays it long enough, she'll end
 Up really being one, and then the pure
 Corn which you sowed will finally be choked 3475
 By weeds. And does that worry you so little?
 Can you really say, in spite of that,
 That with her brother, Recha may perhaps
 Do well?

NATHAN I think so, and I hope so. And 3480
 If she lacks anything from him, can she
 Not always turn to you and me?

TEMPLAR Oh, can
 She possibly lack anything from him?
 The little brother will provide his little
 Sister with a rich supply of food
 And clothing, sweets and finery. What else 3485
 Could such a little sister need? Of course,
 A husband! – Well, the little brother, in
 His own good time, will certainly provide
 Him too; he only has to find him, and 3490
 The more Christian the better! Nathan, Nathan!
 What an angel you created, just
 For others to destroy your work for you.

NATHAN You need not fear that. He will prove to be
 Most worthy of our love.

TEMPLAR Don't say that! Never
 Say that of *my* love! For it will not 3495
 Be cheated of the slightest thing, however small,
 Not even of a name. But tell me, does
 She yet have reason to suspect what has
 Been happening to her?

NATHAN Perhaps, I don't 3500
 Yet know. Why do you ask me?

TEMPLAR Just because
 I have to be the one to tell her what
 Fate threatens her, in either case. I thought
 That I would never see or speak to her
 Again, until I was allowed to call her
 Mine. But all is changed. I'll hurry. 3505

NATHAN Where?
 Come back!

TEMPLAR To her. To see if, in her soul
 This girl is man enough to make the one
 Decision which is worthy of her.

- RECHA Well, I find books most difficult
To read.
- SITTAH You're serious?
- RECHA Quite serious.
My father has no love of cold book-learning
Which imprints itself upon the brain 3535
With lifeless symbols.
- SITTAH How extraordinary!
But maybe there's some truth in it. So, much
Of what you know ...
- RECHA I know only from his
Own teaching. And for most of it I still
Could tell you how and when and why he taught it 3540
To me.
- SITTAH Maybe everything makes better
Sense like this, because the whole soul learns
At once.
- RECHA I'm sure that Sittah has read very
Little.
- SITTAH The contrary, though I'm not proud of it.
Why do you say that? Tell me frankly, why? 3545
- RECHA You are so simple and direct; so natural,
Like no one but yourself.
- SITTAH And what of that?
- RECHA My father says that people who read books
Are seldom like that.
- SITTAH What a splendid man
Your father is!
- RECHA He is.
- SITTAH How near the mark 3550
He always hits.
- RECHA He does. And yet my father ...
- SITTAH What's the matter, Recha dear?
- RECHA My father –
- SITTAH God! Why are you crying?
- RECHA Oh, my father –
I must tell you, or my heart will burst ...
(*overcome by weeping she falls at her feet*)

- SITTAH . But what about? Why? How?
- RECHA Ah, the poor woman, as I told you, is 3585
A Christian, so her love made her torment me.
She is one of those fanatics who
Imagine that they know the only true
And universal way to God.
- SITTAH Yes, now
I understand.
- RECHA They have to lead all those 3590
Who missed the one true way, and guide them to
It. They have little choice. For if it's true
That only this way leads them in
The right direction, then how could they calmly
Watch their friends pursue another path 3595
Which leads them to damnation, eternal
Damnation. Surely one could love and hate
A single person simultaneously.
But it's not that which in the end compels
Me to complain about her. All her sighs 3600
And warnings, all her prayers and all her threats,
I would have tolerated longer – yes.
They always prompted good and useful thoughts.
And surely it is deeply flattering
To us to feel that any fellow-creature 3605
Loves and values us so much as to
Be tortured by the thought of losing us
For all eternity.
- SITTAH That's true!
- RECHA And yet –
I have no weapon against this, not patience,
Not reflection, nothing!
- SITTAH Against what? 3610
- RECHA What she claims to have revealed to me
Just now.
- SITTAH Revealed? Just now?
- RECHA Just now. When we
Were coming here, as we approached a ruined
Christian temple, suddenly she stopped.
She stood, and seemed to struggle with herself. 3615
With tear-filled eyes she looked up at the heavens,
Then at me. At last she said, 'Come, let us
Take the shortest path, right through this temple.'

She led on, I followed her, and I
 Looked round with horror at the crumbling ruins. 3620
 Then she stopped again. I saw that we were
 On the sunken steps before a ruined
 Altar. Imagine how I felt when, weeping
 Scalding tears, she flung herself down at
 My feet, and wrung her hands.

SITTAH My dearest child! 3625

RECHA And by the divinity⁷⁸ who has received
 So many prayers there and, they say, has worked
 So many miracles, she pleaded with me;
 With a look of true compassion she
 Implored me to have mercy on myself. 3630
 Or at least to pardon her if she
 Now told me of her church's claim on me.

SITTAH (Unhappy child! – I feared as much.)

RECHA She said
 I was of Christian blood; I was baptised;
 I was not Nathan's daughter; he was not 3635
 My father. God! God! He is not my father!
 Sittah! Sittah! I prostrate myself
 Before you.

SITTAH Recha, no! Get up. – My brother's here.

Scene 7

Saladin and the preceding

SALADIN What's happened, Sittah?

SITTAH She's distraught! – Oh God! 3640

SALADIN Who is it?

SITTAH But you know

SALADIN Our Nathan's daughter?

What is wrong?

SITTAH Compose yourself, my child.

The Sultan ...

RECHA (*drags herself on her knees to Saladin's feet,
 and bows her head to the ground*)

I shall not stand up! And I
 Shall never look upon the Sultan's face,
 And never more admire the image of 3645

⁷⁸ The Virgin Mary.

Eternal justice and of goodness in
His eyes, and on his brow ...

SALADIN Stand up, stand up!

RECHA Until he promises ...

SALADIN I promise it,
Whatever it may be!

RECHA No more, no less
Than this: to let me keep my father, and 3650
Let him keep me. – I still don't know who else
Demands to be my father, or who has
The right. And I don't want to know. Does blood
Alone create a father?

SALADIN (*raising her up*) Yes, I understand!
Who was so cruel as to put such thoughts 3655
Into your head? But has this matter been
Completely settled? Proved beyond all doubt?

RECHA It must have been. For Daja claims to have it
From my nurse.

SALADIN Your nurse!

RECHA She felt, as she
Was dying, that she must confide in her. 3660

SALADIN As she was dying – and perhaps delirious?
But what if it were true? No: blood, and blood
Alone, can never make a father! Hardly
Even father of a beast. It gives
At most a prior right to claim that name. 3665
So don't let yourself get anxious. And
Do you know what? As soon as these two fathers
Quarrel over you – leave both of them
And take a third. Accept me as your father!

* SITTAH Yes! Oh do!

SALADIN I'll be a good father. 3670
A really good father. But wait! An even
Better thought occurs to me. Why do you
Need a father anyway? What when he dies?
You need to look around for someone who
Will match you in the race of life. Do you 3675
Not know someone?

SITTAH Don't make her blush!

SALADIN That is

Exactly what I meant to do to her.

If blushing makes the ugly beautiful,
 It's bound to make the lovely even lovelier.
 I've asked your father, Nathan, and – another 3680
 Man to join us here. Can you guess who
 That is? I've asked him here – with your permission,
 Sittah ...

SITTAH Brother!

SALADIN Now be sure you really
 Blush before him, dearest girl.

RECHA Why should
 I blush? For whom?

SALADIN You little hypocrite! 3685
 Turn pale, then, if you like. – Just as you please,
 And as you can. –
 (*A slave girl comes in and goes up to Sittah*)

SALADIN Have they arrived already?

SITTAH (*to the slave*)
 Good. Just show them in. – Brother, they're here!

Last Scene

Nathan and the Templar join the others

SALADIN My dear, good friends! – and first of all, dear Nathan
 I must tell you that you now can ask 3690
 For all the money which you lent to be
 Repaid, as quickly as you like.

NATHAN Sultan!

SALADIN I am at *your* service now.

NATHAN Sultan!

SALADIN The caravan has come. And now at last
 I'm richer than I've been for many years. 3695
 Come, tell me what you need to undertake
 Some mighty enterprise! For even merchants
 Like yourself can never have enough
 Of ready cash!

NATHAN Why do you mention first
 So insignificant a trifle? For I see
 Someone in tears. It matters more to me
 That I should dry them. (*Goes up to Recha*)
 You've been crying? What's
 The matter? Are you not my daughter still?

- RECHA My father!
- NATHAN That's enough, we understand
Each other. Now be calm, be cheerful – if 3705
Your heart is still your own, and if your heart
Is threatened by no other loss. – Your father
Is not lost.
- RECHA I fear no other loss.
- TEMPLAR No other? Then, I have deceived myself.
What we are not afraid to lose, we never 3710
Thought that we possessed, and never even
Wanted. Very well! In that case, Nathan,
All is changed. We came here, Saladin,
At your command. But I regret that I
Misled you; give yourself no further trouble! 3715
- SALADIN Must you be so rash again, young man?
Must everything come back to you, defer
To you?
- TEMPLAR But Saladin, you heard and saw?
- SALADIN Yes. And it's a pity you were not
More certain of your case.
- TEMPLAR I am now. 3720
- SALADIN Anyone who boasts of a good deed
Cancels it right out. What you have saved is not
Your property. If that were so, a robber
Driven by his greed into a fire
Would be as good a hero as yourself. 3725
(Going up to Recha, to lead her to the Templar)
Come, dear girl. Don't be too hard on him.
If he were different, less proud and less
Impulsive, he would not have tried to save you.
You must weigh the one against the other.
And now, put him to shame! Do what he should 3730
Have done. Confess your love. Propose to him!
If he refuses you, or if he should
Forget that you have done much more for him,
By taking such a step, than he has done
For you – what did he do for you? He got 3735
Himself a little smoke-stained? How impressive!
Such a man has nothing of my brother,
Assad. He may wear his mask, but not
His heart. So come, my dear ...

TEMPLAR	What?	
NATHAN	You are not a Stauffen.	
TEMPLAR	Who am I?	
NATHAN	Your name's not Curd von Stauffen.	
TEMPLAR	What is it?	
NATHAN	You're Leu von Filnek.	
TEMPLAR	What?	3765
NATHAN	You're startled?	
TEMPLAR	Rightly so. Who says this?	
NATHAN	I do; I could tell you more, much more. But I Am not accusing you of lying.	
TEMPLAR	No?	
NATHAN	Perhaps the other name is also yours.	
TEMPLAR	I should hope so! – (Just as well you said that!)	3770
NATHAN	Yes, your mother was a Stauffen. And Her brother – that's your uncle – brought you up. Your parents left you with him when the harshness Of the German climate drove them out, And they returned here to this country. Now, Your uncle's name was Curd von Stauffen; and Perhaps he did adopt you as a child. Was it with him that you also came here, So long ago? And is he still alive?	3775
TEMPLAR	What can I say to you? Of course, it's true. My uncle died. I only came here with The latest reinforcement of our Order, But – what has all this to do with Recha's Brother?	3780
NATHAN	Now, your father ...	
TEMPLAR	What? You knew Him too?	
NATHAN	Your father was my friend.	
TEMPLAR	Your friend?	3785
	Can it be possible?	
NATHAN	And he was known As Wolf von Filnek; though he was not German.	

- NATHAN Nonsense! Children! You are both my children!
For my daughter's brother is my son –
If he is willing.
(Leaving them to embrace each other Saladin goes in uneasy astonishment to his sister)
- SALADIN Sister, tell me what
You think.
- SITTAH I'm moved.
- SALADIN I too – I almost shudder at 3815
The thought of something still more moving. So
Prepare yourself, as best you can.
- SITTAH What do
You mean?
- SALADIN Nathan, a word with you ...
(While Nathan goes to him, Sittah goes up to the brother and sister to express her sympathy and Nathan and Saladin talk quietly.)
Now listen,
Nathan: did you not just tell us ...
- NATHAN What?
- SALADIN You told us that their father did not come 3820
From Germany, and was not born a German.
So what was he, and where did he come from?
- NATHAN He didn't choose to talk to me about it.
I know nothing that I heard from him.
- SALADIN But he was not a Frank? A Westerner? 3825
- NATHAN No, he was not. He made no secret of it.
He preferred to speak in Persian.
- SALADIN He spoke Persian?
What more do I want? It must be him!
- NATHAN It must be who?
- SALADIN My brother! Assad! There
Can be no doubt!
- NATHAN Now that you've worked it out, 3830
You'll find full confirmation in this book.
(handing him the breviary)
- SALADIN *(opening it eagerly)*
His writing! Yes I recognize that too!
- NATHAN They don't know anything about this. It's
Entirely up to you how much they learn.

- SALADIN *(leafing through the book)*
 Should I not recognise my brother's children? 3835
 My nephew and my niece – my children? Not
 Acknowledge them? And should I let you keep them?
(aloud again)
 Sittah! I was right! They are, they really
 Are! They are our brother's children!
(Runs to embrace them)
- SITTAH *(following him)*
 What!
 But then, how could it have been otherwise? 3840
- SALADIN *(to the Templar)*
 Now, stubborn man, you will be forced to love me!
(to Recha)
 And Recha, I shall be what I offered
 Whether or not you want it!
- SITTAH So shall I.
- SALADIN *(to the Templar again)*
 My son! My Assad! My own Assad's son!
- TEMPLAR So I am of your blood? – And so those dreams 3845
 Which rocked me in my cradle, after all
 Were more than dreams! *(falling at his feet)*
- SALADIN *(raising him up)*
 Just listen to the rascal!
 He suspected something, but he did
 His best to make me murder him! You wait!
(Silently they all embrace each other again and the curtain falls.)

THE END

The main components of this course are:

Studies, I

Nathan the Wise

Studies, II

Illustration Book

Texts, I

Engravings

Texts, II

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